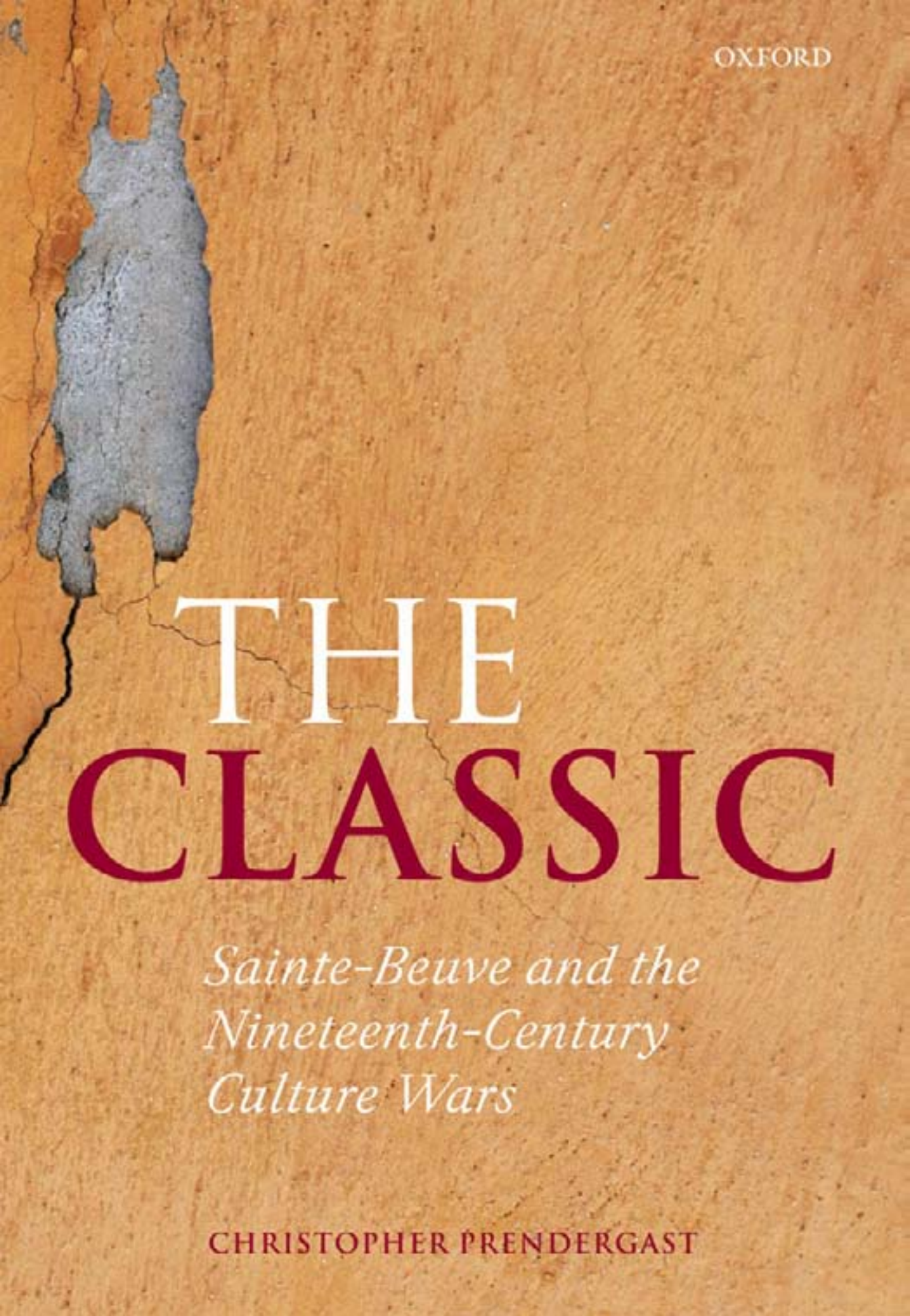
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# The Classic

## *Sainte-Beuve and the Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars*

CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST

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For Malcolm Bowie

In Memoriam

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# *Abbreviations*

| | |
|---|---|
| *CL* | *Causeries du lundi* (16 vols.; 3rd edn.; Paris: Garnier, 1857–70) |
| *NL* | *Nouveaux lundis* (13 vols.; 4th edn.; Paris: Michel Lévy, 1875–8) |
| *Pr.L.* | *Premiers lundis* (3 vols.; Paris: Michel Lévy, 1886–91) |
| *PC* | *Portraits contemporains* (5 vols.; Paris: Michel Lévy, 1869–71) |
| *PF* | *Portraits de femmes* (Paris: Garnier, 1870) |
| *PL* | *Portraits littéraires* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1993) |
| *Corr. gén.* | *Correspondance génerale*, ed. Jean Bonnerot (19 vols.; Paris: Stock, 1935–83) |

# 1

# Introduction: The Profession of Criticism

## I

In literary history, as elsewhere, the mechanisms governing survival and oblivion often operate discontinuously, and are capable of delivering curious reversals. The changing fortunes of Sainte-Beuve's reputation are a case in point. Hailed in the nineteenth century as both the father and the master of modern literary criticism, scarcely read and much derided (each often in direct proportion to the other) for most of the twentieth century, Sainte-Beuve has, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, made a dramatic reappearance in the scholarly world, with a stream of publications amounting to something of a minor rehabilitation industry, in some cases backed by the large claim that Sainte-Beuve is central to our understanding of the nineteenth century as a whole. Some forty years ago René Wellek suggested that Sainte-Beuve was not just formative for the discipline of academic literary history, but was also in his own right 'a major figure in European intellectual history'.[1] At the time, few took the slightest degree of notice (unsurprising in the context of the great theoretical revolutions of the 1960s); it seemed extravagant, and it will still seem so to many today. But that he most surely belongs in an *intellectual* as well as a literary history, far broader and more complex than that marked by the reductive image of his notorious 'biographical' method (the source of most of the derision), is a proposition that can now scarcely be disputed. The question is *which* intellectual history, and just how serenely can we approach it? Answers to those thorny questions are, roughly, the brief of this book.

Gaining purchase on the relevant history and Sainte-Beuve's location within it requires initially a double negative move: keeping one's distance from the more adulatory tones of the rehabilitators (for example, the view that he is best grasped as a 'progressive' social thinker[2]), but also bypassing or scaling

[1] René Wellek, 'Sainte-Beuve', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven, 1965), iii. 34.
[2] Wolf Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002).

the massive wall of resistance that for nearly a century stood in the way of seeing Sainte-Beuve at all. The name graven on that wall is Marcel Proust, who more or less single-handedly determined the only point of view from which one could possibly discuss Sainte-Beuve: *against*. Proust's *Contre Sainte-Beuve* furnished for generations a sort of anti-Beuvian catechism, and remains the obligatory first port of call for all recent commentary, including the work of those anxious to demolish the obstruction and open the space for the legitimate claims of the *pour*.[3] In this respect at least, the present study is no exception in its choice of starting point. But, if it begins with Proust, it is not merely in order to bid farewell to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Unlike the proselytizers, I do not believe that the wall is that easily dismantled. This is not to say that I do not also admire Sainte-Beuve; at his best, he is one of the finest and most formidably learned literary critics one is likely ever to encounter. Nevertheless, as will become progressively clear as this book unfolds, I remain resolutely hostile to the basic dispositions of Sainte-Beuve's cultural project, although the grounds of my own scepticism are by no means uniquely Proustian ones.

Proust's objections to Sainte-Beuve are primarily objections to the biographical method, the insistence on explaining the work by reference to the man. The Proustian aesthetic insists of course on their radical separation, on the rift or incommensurability between the social persona of the author and his creative self ('un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices' (a book is the product of a self other than that which we display in our habits, in company, in our vices)[4]). I shall not dwell on this particular polemic (my own reasons for calling first on Proust being quite other), except to say that, even on Proust's own assumptions, the real picture is altogether less tidy. The more maliciously inclined have delighted in catching Proust himself in flagrante delicto of self-contradiction.[5] Conversely, if we did not know the source of the following statement, to whom would we be more likely to attribute it? 'La Bruyère vit tout entier dans son livre; c'est là qu'il faut le chercher, et non ailleurs' (La Bruyère lives entirely in his book; it is there, and nowhere else, that one must seek him).[6] It is Sainte-Beuve, though it could easily have been

[3] See José Cabanis, *Pour Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1987).

[4] Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1971), 221–2.

[5] Michel Crépu reminds us that Proust's denunciation of Sainte-Beuve for having confused art and life is compromised when, inadvertently, Proust 'explains' the more lamentable features of the *Lundis* by adducing the pressures of journalistic deadlines (*Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 15).

[6] *NL* i. 124. It is true, however, that Sainte-Beuve goes on to specify the life in the book as the external life of its creator. Along with the article 'Essai de critique naturelle' (*NL* ix. 62–88), the 1862 text on Chateaubriand was the manifesto piece for the Beuvian 'method' as a biographically inflected form of the new school of historical studies, and to which Sainte-Beuve gives the

Proust (who places at the heart of his rejection of Sainte-Beuve the proposition that 'le moi de l'écrivain ne se montre que dans ses livres' (the writer's self shows itself only in his books)).[7] Could it then be that, as so often in the literary agon, the two have more in common than admitted by the adversarial stance of the one who comes after? It is certainly the case that, when Proust writes that 'en aucun temps de sa vie Sainte-Beuve ne semble avoir conçu la littérature d'une façon vraiment profonde' (at no period of his life does Sainte-Beuve seem to have had a really profound conception of literature),[8] he misses or elides a very great deal of what it was about Sainte-Beuve that led Henry James to call him 'the acutest critic the world has ever seen'[9] and Rémy de Gourmont to describe him as 'almost the only critic of the nineteenth century, the only creator of values'.[10] How, for example, could Proust, whose own literary temperament and practice were marked by an effortlessly absorbed immersion in the history of French prose, not have recognized the superlative quality of Sainte-Beuve's own reviews of that history, from his two-page encapsulated summary of the sixteenth-century epistolary mode[11] to the sure-footed account of the longer-haul transformation of prose writing from the seventeenth century through to Rousseau and early romanticism? When Sainte-Beuve says of Rousseau's *Confessions* that a note both new and true is struck in the artless simplicity of its subject's reference to setting off hungry at dawn 'résolu de mettre à un bon déjeuner deux pièces de six blancs qui me restaient encore' (resolved to spend on a hearty breakfast the two six-penny coins that remained to me), he is writing in an idiom not that

names 'natural history' and 'moral science' ('la méthode naturelle en littérature' (*NL* iii. 32)). This is the text that Proust quotes, in particular the programmatic statement: 'la littérature, la production littéraire, n'est point pour moi distincte ou du moins séparable du reste de l'homme et de l'organisation' (literature, literary production, is not for me distinct or at least separable from the man and his make-up) (iii. 15). But it is also the text in which Sainte-Beuve says that the interior life of Chateaubriand is to be found in, and only in, the pages of his writings (where 'toutes ses humeurs, ses splendeurs de bile et ses âcretés de sang, si je peux dire, ont fait eruption' (all his humours, the bilious splendour and the pungent taste of blood, if I may put it like this, burst forth) (iii. 2–3)). This could easily stand as a Proustian statement of the distinctive literary signature of a writer's creative world, or even as consistent with Barthes's notion of 'style' as a repository and product of the secret humours of the body. These moments are exemplary instances of what François Rigolot calls 'passages à tonalité étrangement proustienne' (passages that strike a strangely Proustian note) ('Pour Sainte-Beuve (1804–1904–2004): Propos d'un seiziémiste', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1/6 (2004)). See also Michel Brix, 'Proust beuviste?', in *Sainte-Beuve ou la liberté critique* (Jaignes, 2002).

[7] Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 225. [8] Ibid.

[9] Henry James, *Literary Reviews and Essays*, ed. Albert Mordell (New York, 1957), 79. James extends the accolade: 'His intellectual fecundity was so unbounded that one imagines that the history of his individual opinions would throw a preternaturally brilliant light upon the laws of the human mind at large' (p. 83).

[10] Rémy de Gourmont, *Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Glenn S. Burne (Ann Arbor, 1966), 206.

[11] *CL* viii. 110–11.

different from Proust's attempt to capture in the tiniest details the whole affective universe of Gérard de Nerval.[12]

There is therefore more than one straw man in Proust's relentlessly aggressive sparring with Sainte-Beuve. Why then bother re-entering a terrain littered with so many suppressions and misprisions? For my purposes it is because of another, related yet highly specific, element of Proust's critique. The charge is that, in confusing art and life, the internal and the external, Sainte-Beuve lacked 'profundity' by virtue of putting literature on 'le même plan que la conversation' (the same plane as conversation).[13] The fundamental premiss rests not only on a non-negotiable severance of private and public, but also on a categorical distinction between writing and speech. Sainte-Beuve errs, and thus betrays the cause of literature, from an excess of other-directed 'sociability' whose form is that of a kind of conversation ('ce qu'on donne à l'intimité, c'est-à-dire à la conversation' (what one gives to sociability, that is to conversation)).[14] In his own manner, Sainte-Beuve does what he was to accuse Chateaubriand of doing: writing not from and for himself but for an audience. Beuvian sociability will be characterized by Proust from several standpoints. Its origin, however, lay in Sainte-Beuve's decision to become a professional critic addressing a social world of readers through the medium of journalism, thus abandoning 'ce monde unique, fermé, sans communication avec le dehors' (this unique, enclosed world, incommunicado with the outside) that is the indispensable condition of preserving those 'précieuses pensées' from which alone significant achievement flows.[15]

This indeed was for Sainte-Beuve the crucial decision of his working life, to dedicate himself to being what he variously termed a 'critique de profession' (a professional critic)[16] and 'un critique qui est, comme nous le sommes, à son poste de chaque semaine' (a critic such as myself, at his post week in week out).[17] Amongst other things, the labour of the professional (the weekly grind of producing the *Lundis*) led to an identification (in some respects, as

[12] 'Tout le Rousseau naturel est là, avec sa rêverie, son idéal, sa réalité' (All of natural Rousseau is there, with his reverie, his ideal, his reality) (*CL* iii. 96). See also 'Chaque écrivain a son mot de prédilection, qui revient fréquemment dans le discours et qui trahit par mégarde, chez celui qui l'emploie, un vœu secret ou un faible' (Every writer has his favourite word, which recurs frequently in the discourse and which inadvertently betrays in its user a secret wish or a weakness) (*PC* i. 162).

[13] Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 225.

[14] Ibid. 224. Sainte-Beuve himself put it like this: 'La vraie critique à Paris se fait en causant: c'est en allant au scrutin de toutes les opinions que la critique composerait son résultat le plus complet et le plus juste' ( True criticism in Paris is done through conversation; it is by consulting all opinions that criticism puts together a result that is the most complete and the most just) (*Mes poisons* (Paris, 1926), 127).

[15] Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 225.

[16] *NL* viii. 121. [17] *CL* vi. 52.

we shall later see, disingenuous) with the 'worker': 'voué et adonné à mon métier de critique, j'ai tâché d'être de plus en plus un bon et, s'il se peut, un habile ouvrier' (dedicated and devoted to my trade as a critic, I have tried to be an increasingly good and, so far as possible, a skilful worker).[18] Let us discount the non-trivial but uninteresting point that Proust's objection to this decision is all very well if one happens to be endowed with a private income, thus insulating the private world of 'precious thoughts' from the chill winds of economic necessity ('la critique, c'est le gagne-pain' (criticism is a living), Sainte-Beuve forthrightly observes, in the article on Gautier[19]). The larger and more interesting question concerns the terms preferred by Sainte-Beuve for his own insertion into the nineteenth-century public sphere, and what they tell us about his conception of both literature and literary criticism. The issue is not that Sainte-Beuve came to construe criticism as a sustained conversation with a readership (at this very general level the only thing natural to Proust's a priori assumption that here lies perdition is that it is naturally contestable), but rather what sort of conversation he thought it appropriate to have, especially in the twenty years running from the revolutions of 1848 to his death in 1868.

## II

At exactly mid-century two interconnected events took place in Sainte-Beuve's work. In October 1850 he published the meta-critical essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', which is to be the pivot of the following enquiry, and towards the end of the year gathered together the articles of his first twelve months as the flagship critic of the newspaper *Le Constitutionnel* for publication as a separate volume (it was to be the first volume in the original edition of the *Causeries du lundi* and included the piece on the subject of the classic). He also appended a short preface, explaining (in somewhat edited form) the circumstances of taking up his new post and also reviewing the previous twenty-five years of what he now called his 'career' as a critic. He distinguished three phases, each corresponding to a different set of critical imperatives or three 'conversational' styles. The first, when 'jeune et débutant', entering the lists on behalf of the romantics, was polemical in spirit ('la critique polémique, volontiers agressive, entreprenante du moins, de la critique d'invasion' (polemical criticism, willingly aggressive, at the very least enterprising, an invasive criticism)). The second—the years of the July Monarchy—was devoted to a 'critique plus neutre, plus impartiale, mais surtout analytique, *descriptive*

[18] *NL* xiii. 20–1. [19] *NL* vi. 296.

et curieuse' (more neutral criticism, more impartial, but above all analytical, *descriptive*, and curious). The third—of which the forthcoming volume of the *Causeries* was to be a first instalment—was to be neither polemical nor neutral, but judgemental, in the sense of the considered, reflective judgements of the 'mature' critic:

> Il y avait depuis longtemps que je demandais qu'une occasion se presentât à moi d'être critique, tout à fait critique comme je l'entends, avec ce que l'âge et l'expérience m'avaient donné de plus mûr et aussi peut-être de plus hardi … Depuis vingt-cinq ans déjà que j'ai débuté dans la carrière, c'est la troisième forme que je suis amené à donner à mes impressions et à mes jugements littéraires.
>
> For a long time I had been hoping that an occasion would present itself to me to be a critic, completely a critic as I understand it, in terms of what age and experience had given me in greater maturity and perhaps also greater boldness … In the twenty-five years since I began this career, it is to this third form that I am now led in which to present my impressions and my literary judgements.[20]

Elsewhere he represented this shift of gear as the switch from being an 'advocate' to being a 'judge'.[21]

These last are dismal metaphors (we shall, dispiritingly, have to return to them more fully in subsequent chapters). But they also reflect a lively debate in Sainte-Beuve's mind about the function of criticism at the moment of its birth as a professional pursuit. The retrospective construction of a chronology divided into three phases to some extent masks the true nature of that debate, many of whose terms were there from the beginning and stayed with him throughout. While it accurately maps significant changes of emphasis, its narrative of the critic's development as a kind of minor *Bildungsroman*, whose hero journeys from youthful enthusiasms to mature adulthood, conceals the fact that all along there was an abiding set of tensions in Sainte-Beuve's thinking between intellectually competing views of the purposes of modern criticism. One of the most telling of these strains engaged the distinction between the 'neutral' and the 'judgemental', or, more broadly, between the new historical school of philological research and the appraisive tradition of the older humanist–rhetorical school of belles-lettres. In the articles on Du Bellay, Sainte-Beuve acknowledged that the replacement of the latter by the former was a *fait accompli* and that he himself had no intention of trying to resist the tide:

> Avant de s'écrier: *Que c'est beau!* Il convient de se demander: *Est-ce exact?* C'est en ce sens que je dis qu'il n'est plus permis aujourd'hui d'être humaniste; il faut être soi-même du métier, être armé de la loupe et du scalpel grammatical, il faut être philologue.

[20] *CL* i. 2 (emphasis in original). [21] *PL* 1077.

Before exclaiming: *How beautiful!* it is proper to ask: *Is it exact?* It is in this sense that I maintain that it is no longer permissible today to be a humanist; one has to be oneself a professional, armed with the magnifying glass and the grammatical scalpel, one must be a philologist.[22]

Matters, however, were not quite so simple as merely bowing to the forces that had brought historical consciousness itself centre-stage, not only in literary studies but across the whole field of humanistic enquiry. In his remarks on Du Bellay, even as he greets the inevitable, Sainte-Beuve stands back and directs his gaze longingly to a time when things were otherwise. He will return compulsively to this rivalry of paradigms wherever he happens to find himself: in antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the modern period. When simply to understand a text on it own terms and when to judge it on a set of terms decided by the critic was a question that constantly exercised him. The issue was further complicated by what Sainte-Beuve himself understood by 'understanding. For 'neutral'—that is to say, historical—criticism could be further subdivided into two interconnected yet separable endeavours. One was concerned with building an archive, the other with entering it, in the attempt to re-experience, from within, the historical world it housed. The first was an offshoot of the origins of literary history in what Marmontel had called 'érudition', of which the researches of the Benedictines that produced the *Histoire littéraire de la France* were the principal eighteenth-century example and whose nineteenth-century outcome was the positivist school.[23] If Sainte-Beuve both respects (and himself contributes to) what he termed 'ces excursions érudites qui sont fort à la mode aujourd'hui' (those erudite excursions that are so fashionable today),[24] the fact-finding and source-hunting tours of modern scholarship are often seen as little more than the badge of having done one's homework and paid one's dues as a 'professional' to the modern work ethic.[25]

[22] *CL* xiii. 299. See also the article on Taine: 'La vue historique a tout envahi dans les Lettres: elle domine désormais toute étude, elle préside à toute lecture' (The historical point of view has invaded everywhere in Letters; it now dominates all study, presides over all reading) (*NL* viii. 112).

[23] See Antoine Compagnon, *Le Démon de la théorie littéraire: Littérature et sens commun* (Paris, 1998), 214–15. Sainte-Beuve himself wrote a review of the literary–historical endeavours of the Benedictines at Saint-Maur (*CL* viii. 273–307).

[24] *CL* xv. 209.

[25] In Sainte-Beuve's terms, it is proof that one has not been 'lazy' (see *NL* ix. 81 and *CL* xv. 375). In the 'Essai de critique naturelle', he formulated the position as a mix of art and science: 'La critique littéraire ne saurait devenir une science toute positive; elle restera un art, et un art très-délicat dans la main de ceux qui sauront s'en servir; mais cet art profitera et a déjà profité de toutes les inductions de la science et de toutes les acquisitions de l'histoire' (Literary criticism cannot become a purely empirical science; it will remain an art, and a very delicate art at that, in the hands of those who know how to use it; but this art will benefit and has already benefited from all the inductions of science and all the acquisitions of history) (*NL* ix. 84–5).

Alongside the cult of erudition, there was, however, another and deeper version of what was entailed by historically based literary 'understanding'. This was the philological enterprise that in Germany came to be known as the hermeneutic science of textual study. Sainte-Beuve did not use the term 'hermeneutics', but he was, if only in passing, cognizant of Schleiermacher's work,[26] and, in any case, with or without the technical term, the project of a hermeneutic of past cultures and societies had long taken hold across a range of disciplines, from biblical exegesis to historiography and literary history. In Sainte-Beuve's own terms, this meant 'neutral' criticism as the exercise of a form of negative capability, a surrender of self to otherness through a patient act of empathetic identification with the point of view and stylistic universe of the text under consideration. Its primary aim was to abolish not difference but distance, to draw the past close in a 'conversation' with an author in which the role of critic was that of listener:

> dans ma critique, je tâche d'appliquer mon âme à celle des autres; je me détache de moi … La critique est pour moi une métamorphose: je tâche de disparaître dans le personnage que je reproduis … Il n'y a qu'une manière de bien comprendre les hommes, c'est de ne point se hâter en les jugeant, c'est de vivre auprès d'eux, de les laisser s'expliquer, se développer jour par jour, et se peindre eux-mêmes en nous.
>
> in my criticism, I try to apply my soul to that of others; I detach myself from myself … Criticism is for me a metamorphosis: I try to disappear into the individual I reproduce … There is but one way to understand men, it is not to rush to judgement, it is to live alongside them, to let them explain themselves, to develop from day to day, and to portray themselves in us.[27]

But in addition to the model of the conversation *with* (or, more accurately, the self-effacing submission to the voice of the other), there was also the fertile idea of the conversation *between*, criticism as the orchestration of a dialogue of texts and authors. Sainte-Beuve carried French literature around in his head as a vast echo chamber, permitting all manner of varyingly probable filiations and associations.[28] If he followed literary–historical convention in periodizing according to centuries, this was no impediment to cross-century leaps and asides, bringing, say, writers of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries into companionable relationship. No anxiety of influence here, but, precisely, a set of 'conversational' exchanges within a perceived continuum

[26] *PC* iv. 178.

[27] *Mes poisons*, 10, 126. In one of several articles devoted to Joseph de Maistre, Sainte-Beuve represented this relation of text and critic as the relation of host and guest (*PL* 652–3).

[28] 'Assembler, soutenir et mettre en jeu à la fois dans un instant donné *le plus de rapports*, agir en masse et avec concert, c'est là le difficile et le grand art' (Assembling, holding together, putting into play at any given moment *the greatest number of relations*, manipulating them in the mass and in concert, that is the difficult and the great art) (*PL* 1075, emphasis in original).

of discourse. 'Je parlais l'autre jour de Voltaire,' writes Sainte-Beuve, 'parlons un peu de Béranger' (I was speaking of Voltaire the other day, let us speak a little of Béranger), adding 'rien de plus naturel' (nothing more natural).[29] He tried, somewhat unpersuasively, to theorize these ad hoc alignments as a system of natural 'families', according to which certain types of literary mind belonged together irrespective of historical location. But, once stripped of its pseudo-naturalistic overlay, it is a feature of the Beuvian 'method' that has rightly caught the eye of those anxious to release Sainte-Beuve from the more ponderous life-and-times approach on which the 'method' is standardly based.[30] Roberto Calasso, for instance, has used it to turn the tables on the Proustian critique: 'Here, precisely where Proust wanted to offer a devasting description of Sainte-Beuve's ''method'', he revealed its secret, which was in fact very close to his own.' The *Causeries* 'prove to be, thanks above all to the artifice of conversation, an immense hallucinatory novel in instalments, crammed with rumours, allusions, interrupted recollections, gossip, fleeting images, echoes, reappearances'. Calasso's more general conclusion is certainly eye-catching: 'By virtue not only of its size but also of a profound affinity in its conception, the *Table générale et analytique* of the *Causeries* takes its place alongside three other great indexes of names: that of Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*, that of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, and that of Proust's *Recherche*.'[31]

This is indeed an arresting set of comparisons, an instance, we might say, of criticism as postmodern *bricolage* in its pure form, but also perhaps a case of 'judgement' pushing its luck. Sainte-Beuve himself would have received the comparison with Saint-Simon as a compliment, but he would have detested the analogy with Balzac (his own detestation of the latter spilling over into the unadulteratedly bilious), and would doubtless have been utterly bewildered by the alignment with Proust. Yet, whatever strains this image of Sainte-Beuve inflicts on plausibility, it has the virtue of foregrounding an important characteristic of Beuvian criticism when at its most inventive—namely, its exploratory openness, based on a belief in the critical enterprise as devoted to permanently unfinished business. This is what he found and admired in Pierre Bayle:

> cette tolérance prompte, facile, aiguisée de plaisir, est une des conditions du génie critique, dont le propre, quand il est complet, consiste à courir au premier signe sur le terrain d'un chacun, à s'y trouver à l'aise, à s'y jouer en maître et à connaître de toutes choses.

[29] *CL* ii. 126.

[30] 'tout ne cesse de s'y croiser, tout y est sans cesse en situation d'échos, de liaisons, de connexions et d'analogies inépuisables' (everything crosses with everything else, everything is ceaselessly in a place of echoes, liaisons, inexhaustible connections and analogies) (Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve*, 51).

[31] Roberto Calasso, *The Ruins of Kasch* (London, 1995), 97–8.

this prompt and easy tolerance, quickened with pleasure, is one of the conditions of critical genius, whose proper form, when complete, consists in speeding at the first sign onto the terrain of everybody, being at ease there, while effortlessly playing the master and knowing everything.[32]

Sainte-Beuve sought to make this into one of the defining principles of his own undertaking, and many years later (the essay on Bayle was written in 1835) converted it into a veritable *profession de foi*, so impressive in its beautifully articulated commitment to the open road of perpetual discovery that it deserves to be quoted more or less in its entirety:

J'en suis venu … à considérer que, quoi que je fasse ou ne fasse pas, travaillant dans le cabinet à un ouvrage suivi, m'éparpillant aux articles, me dispersant dans le monde, laissant manger mes heures aux fâcheux, aux nécessiteux, aux rendez-vous, à la rue, n'importe à qui et à quoi, je ne cesse de faire une seule et même chose, de lire un seul et même livre, livre infini, perpétuel, du monde et de la vie, que nul n'achève … je le lis donc à toutes les pages qui se présentent, à bâtons rompus, au rebours, qu'importe? je ne cesse de le continuer. Plus la bagarre est grande et l'interruption fréquente, plus aussi j'avance dans ce livre dans lequel on n'est jamais qu'au milieu; mais le profit, c'est de l'avoir lu ouvert à toutes sortes de milieux différents.

I have come … to the view that, whatever I do or do not do, labouring in my study on a sustained piece of work, scattering myself among articles, dispersing myself in society, allowing my hours to be devoured by the importunate, the needy, by rendez-vous and street encounters, anyone and anything, I never cease to do but one and the same thing, to read one and the same book, an infinite, perpetual book, of both the world and of life, which no one ever finishes … I thus read it on all the pages that come my way, haphazardly, sideways, what does it matter? I press on with it. The stronger the fight and the more frequent the interruption, the more I advance in this book in which one is always only in the middle; but the gain is to have read it in a state of openness to many different kinds of setting.[33]

Apart from a passing (and grudging) reference to 'une tendance libérale et libre penseuse' (a liberal and free-thinking tendency) in Sainte-Beuve, none of this has a place in the Proustian picture. On the other hand, what (in the same sentence) is set against this concession to the free thinker demands serious attention: what Proust identified as 'une tendance mondaine et conservatrice' (a wordly and conservative tendency), along with 'une certaine disposition à s'incliner devant les pouvoirs établis' (a certain inclination to bow before established authority), at once aesthetic and political.[34] The neutral mode, for all its enlargement of the range of sympathies, came to be seen, at the time of embarking on the kind of 'conversation' envisaged and announced in the title of the *Causeries du lundi*, as suffering from a 'defect' (Sainte-Beuve's

[32] *PL* 253. [33] *Mes poisons*, 140. [34] Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 230.

term)—namely, that it was too neutral: 'elle ne concluait pas' (it did not conclude).[35] The new conversational turn—this time as address to a wider reading public—was to lead to a conclusion, a conclusive judgement bearing a certain regulative authority; Bayle was to give way to Boileau as the critic's alter ego.[36] This of course is to simplify, and the reality of the *causeries* is very often an expertly sustained combination of both roles. Nevertheless the *causeries* embodied a new set of priorities that, designed to deal with one 'defect', brought in their train another. For the problem with this new insistence on conclusive judgement concerned the grounds on which such judgements were to rest. An understandable impatience with the limitations of Bayle's happy eclecticism was not the central issue, in its own historical context an instance of the early Enlightenment mind freeing itself from the shackles of absolutist orthodoxy. The problem derived from a distinctively modern, nineteenth-century conundrum, the forms of uncertainty as to the grounds of judgement represented, for example, by Flaubert's paradoxically categorical assertion: 'la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure' (stupidity consists in the desire to conclude).[37] Here we find the modernist stress not on liberal but on *radical* openness, less a plea for tolerant hospitality to all-comers than a haunted sense of the frailty and provisionality of all our constructions and representations of the world.

This was a thought—sometimes associated with the advent of modern 'nihilism'—that Sainte-Beuve was compelled to entertain but that he greatly feared. Taking it to the limit meant the creation of an abhorrent vacuum, in which the demons of 'anarchy' are let loose. The desire to conclude was in large measure the desire to paper over that vacuum. Concluding meant closure, the appraisive paradigm reigning in the negative capabilities of the neutral mode, as well as the historically relativizing drift of the new positivist stress on 'erudition'. The key term here was the word *goût*, consistently invoked to signpost the alternative to the modern historicizing tendency: 'La critique et l'érudition, guidées par l'esprit historique, se sont livrées depuis quelques années à un grand travail qui a son prix' (Literary criticism and scholarship, guided by the historical spirit, have for several years now given themselves over to a great work that has its own reward). But, Sainte-Beuve continues, 'encourageons toute recherche laborieuse, mais laissons en tout la maîtrise au

[35] *CL* i. 3.

[36] Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston, 1940), 126–7.

[37] Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris, 1926–33), ii. 239. See the entry for 'Critique' in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: 'Toujours éminent. Est censé tout connaître, tout savoir, avoir tout lu, tout vu' (Always eminent. Is supposed to know everything, to have mastered everything, to have read everything, seen everything) (*Le Second Volume de Bouvard et Pécuchet*, ed. Geneviève Bollème (Paris, 1966), 250).

talent, à la méditation, au jugement, à la raison, au goût' (let us encourage all industrious research, while leaving everything subject to the authority of talent, reflection, judgement, reason, taste).[38] This was, of course, to refer the issue of 'judgement' to a time-honoured court of appeal, though one whose jurisdictional brief was not set in stone. Even at the moment of its construction as an imperiously canonical value in the seventeenth century, the concept of 'taste' led a complex life in the history of French legislative poetics, its notional self-assurance in fact belied by multiple divisions and contradictions, although by the nineteenth century it had become little more than a slogan in the war of the romantics and the classicists.[39] We shall see more of its behaviour in the Beuvian lexicon in Chapter 3. But, in brief, Sainte-Beuve struggled with the difficulty of rejecting its congealed version in the discourse of the academicians while retaining it, in as non-dogmatically flexible a form as possible, as a benchmark, a foundation for judgement. There was only one way to square the circle of the flexible and the foundational, namely, by replacing formulated dogma with an implicit appeal to an assumed agreement between right-minded readers as to what constituted good taste; its regulative force was less theoretical than social (what in fact it had always been).

The pursuit of a consensus-based standard of public taste had moreover a crucial political context: the wrenching experience of 1848. As we shall see in due course, the project of the *Lundis* is fully intelligible only in relation to what 1848 meant to Sainte-Beuve. It brought him to a view of the aim of criticism as essentially 'reparative', the cultural ally of political 'order' (what Proust alludes to in speaking of 'une certaine disposition à s'incliner devant les pouvoirs établis') in the business of repairing the damage wrought by 'regression' to a state of 'savagery'. The insurrections of 1848 instilled or reinforced in Sainte-Beuve both a fear of passion (associated with repugnant 'excess') and a fear of conflict. Differences of opinion were, of course, liberally tolerated, even welcomed, but preferably within an amicably demarcated space for disagreements, the space in which gentlemen can beg to differ. 'Polite' and 'agreeable' became two of Sainte-Beuve's master terms, supporting a conception of public discourse that was a matter of tone as much as of substance.[40] This is what Proust could not abide, the tasteful as merely bland, the small change of salon talk, the kind of thing that, when reaching to bestow a few kind words on Baudelaire, led Sainte-Beuve to choose the adjective

[38] *CL* xv. 374. 'Je veux de l'érudition, mais une érudition maîtrisée par le jugement et organisée par le goût' (I am for erudition, but an erudition mastered by judgement and ordered by taste) (*Mes poisons*, 127).

[39] See Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1988).

[40] 'oui, en matière de goût, j'ai, je l'avoue, un grand faible, j'aime ce qui est agréable' (yes, in the matter of taste, I have, I confess, a great weakness, I like what is agreeable) (*NL* x. 403).

*délicieux* to describe the aspects of Baudelaire's poetic style with which he felt comfortable.[41] At its worst, this manner was indistinguishable from an unctuous droning, a cascade of civilized epithets low on insight and high on redundancy, social noise rather than analysis or argument (Balzac was even crisper, characterizing the Beuvian house style as 'a continuous drizzle that soaks one to the bones'[42]).

Balzac, however, had a personal axe to grind, his withering review of *Port-Royal* revenge for Sainte-Beuve's refusal to take him seriously as a novelist. And, where Proust's strictures are concerned, we must repeat that much of this was based on a subjective preference masquerading as doctrine, a *parti pris* that only (a certain class of) Proustians could take as gospel. There was another way with Sainte-Beuve's worldliness, a counter to Proust's stern ascesis, the genial way of Henry James, although, if we return here to the example of James, it is also because the apparently alternative view comes with a sting in the tail. According to James, Sainte-Beuve was both a 'man of books' and 'a man of the world'. But the latter attribute was not, as it was for Proust, a compromising liability for the former; it was rather one of the terms of a mutually nourishing congruence: 'He appeals to the cultured man, to the highly civilized and finished social unit, but he appeals to him in behalf of something which demands no sacrifice of points of contact with the world, but an increase and higher sensibility in each.'[43] The merit of Sainte-Beuve lies in the fact that he stands for 'culture': 'Sainte-Beuve, of all men was devoted to culture in its purest and most incorruptible forms', in particular the 'part of culture—the part of that penetrating and initiated taste of which Sainte-Beuve was so eminent a representative'.[44] But, at the very moment of delivering his compliment, James manages to make it sound like something of a backhander: Sainte-Beuve's defence of the civilized canons of taste contains a hint of the provincial and the parochial, at precisely the point where the ideal of taste brings the meaning of 'culture' into exclusive alignment with the 'cultured'. For the model of the 'cultured man' in Sainte-Beuve is always and only French. This did not mean that non-French did not qualify, but, if they did so, it was, with some notable exceptions (above all Shakespeare), to the extent that they embodied virtues that were themselves quintessentially French (we shall see in the final chapter where all this was to lead). 'He was a Frenchman to his finger-tips', writes James, 'and his intellect, his erudition, his taste, his tone, his style, were of a deeply national stamp.' The type of Frenchness that stamped his writings was 'the vein of old French conservatism of taste', which, while 'making occasionally a startling deflection into dangerous places', was also

[41] *CL* ix. 529. [42] Quoted in Harold Nicolson, *Sainte-Beuve* (London, 1957), 238.
[43] James, *Literary Reviews and Essays*, 86. [44] Ibid. 84.

characterized (this is where we encounter the backhander) as 'never altogether, as simple *taste*, losing a certain remote family likeness to Philistinism'.[45] Here Proust and James are not far apart.

## III

When Rémy de Gourmont claimed that Sainte-Beuve was a 'creator of values', he meant principally that he taught us how to see (French) literature as *a* literature, a coherent ensemble.[46] This was no mean achievement, but it was secured at a price. All too often the intriguing labyrinth of transhistorical echoes and resemblances involved a sacrifice of difference (the focus of the more 'neutral' mode of criticism) to an image of commonality, the 'family' as genealogy, where belonging was a matter of pedigree and legitimacy (misbegotten and thus unwanted offspring, especially of recent birth, are simply left out).[47] Some of Sainte-Beuve's family resemblances have the power to startle, but they are never shocking or provocative. The prose style of Mme de Sévigné might be unusually related to that of Henri IV,[48] but it would never have occurred to Sainte-Beuve to propose anything like Proust's statement of affinity between Mme de Sévigné and Dostoevsky. That would be all too disruptive of the salon atmosphere of Sainte-Beuve's imagined literary gatherings, an indecorous violation of the codes of 'natural' filiation; in the *Causeries* the 'circuits de la bibliothèque' (circuits of the library) are not those of the mysterious private library of Borges, but are built from a very strong identification with 'le corps historique d'une langue' (the historical corpus of a language).[49]

Amongst other things, this entailed a conception of literature as *a* literature that was increasingly governed and controlled by something called 'tradition'. The idea of the tradition was the place where the 'old French conservatism of taste' was most explicitly deployed to manage the different and often contradictory aspects of Sainte-Beuve's view of the purposes of criticism, most notably in the 1858 text 'De la tradition en littérature' (the attempt was not conspicuously successful[50]). But there was also another, related idea—albeit a much larger and more complex one, by no means either synonymous with

[45] James, *Literary Reviews and Essays*, 84, 87 [46] De Gourmont, *Selected Writings*, 209–10.
[47] Crépu describes the intertextual world of the *Lundis* as forming a 'tissu généalogique' (a genealogical fabric) (*Sainte-Beuve*, 54). Anne Jones and Nancy Vickers describe Sainte-Beuve's position as 'a fantasy of the great writer's consistently direct relationship to an evolving communal mind' ('Canon, Rule and the Restoration Renaissance', *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1998), 15).
[48] *CL* ix. 385. [49] Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve*, 55. [50] See Ch. 3.

or reducible to the Tradition—which was ultimately called upon to play an even more decisive role in the regulative emphasis that the Sainte-Beuve of the *Causeries* wished to assign to the task of the critic: the idea of the 'classic', above all its formulation in the 1850 essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. For the classic had a property that was less prominent in the construal of the tradition. The latter was a historical and descriptive category. It was not of course value-free. It was, first, a cultural good in its own right (literatures lacking a properly constituted tradition were the poor relations of the family) and, secondly, underpinned—at least in the French case—by the right sort of values. It remained nevertheless more a synthesizing tool for organizing and understanding a literary past. The idea of the classic, on the other hand, was value-laden through and through. It provided the litmus test for what really *counted*, and was thus more fertile conceptual terrain for the exercise of discriminating judgement, for what it meant to make up one's mind or to 'conclude'.

At first sight, nothing could be less rigidly prescriptive than the essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. I have referred to it, somewhat clunkily, as a 'meta-critical' essay, in the sense of a text dealing with some general critical problems. There are relatively few of these in the Sainte-Beuve corpus, his preferred *modus operandi* as a critic being the study—or 'portrait' as he called it—of an individual writer. Moreover in referring to it as a meta-critical text, this should not be taken to mean that it is a heavy-duty theoretical intervention (of the type we might encounter in, say, Schiller or Coleridge). It belongs rather to the older belletrist tradition, which itself is part of the story to tell about Sainte-Beuve's place in the history of modern criticism. More fluid in its terms than the theoretical treatise, its title instructively takes the form of a question, thus signalling that it is opening onto a terrain where answers are not simply given in advance. It is, of course, a familiar question, one that returns to haunt us, although in terms that vary according to changing interests and priorities. If, as Frank Kermode has put it, the classic is a 'permanent locus of change', then the question of the classic is itself a classic question; the category remains in place, but the ways we fill it shift according to the altered conditions in which we return again and again to the question.[51] Thus it matters a great deal who asks the question (from the point of view of what set of interests), and also what the historical circumstances are in which it is posed. Today it is entwined with debates about the canon and quarrels over whether there is

[51] Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London, 1975), 139. Ernst Robert Curtius defined it as 'a problem which is crucial not only for the understanding but for the transmission of the humanities. The problem can be stated thus: What is a classic? T. S. Eliot, as you remember, raised this question in 1944. Sainte-Beuve had done so in 1850. Every age is confronted with this question' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 590).

any longer (or indeed ever was other than in mystified forms) a community of books in which common identities can be constructed and shared.

A genealogical account of how we got to where we are now on these matters will refer to various landmark texts, above all perhaps T. S. Eliot's 1946 lecture to the London Virgil Society with exactly the same title, 'What is a Classic?', and which refers, though only in passing, to Sainte-Beuve's essay.[52] While I discuss the Sainte-Beuve–Eliot relationship at a later stage, my main purpose is not, however, to trace a genealogy of the present. It is rather, first, to explore how this question was posed in the conditions of the nineteenth century, mainly in France but with also a wider European extension, and, secondly, to describe the larger stakes of cultural understanding and self-understanding bound up with the question at that historical juncture. This, it seems to me, is the most fruitful context for evaluating Wellek's assertion that Sainte-Beuve was a 'major' figure in modern European intellectual history. But, if Sainte-Beuve's 1850 essay on the classic opens a door to that place, there are many doors that have to be opened onto it, a series of scholarly and disciplinary contextualizations, exfoliated, so to speak, from the essay and that range far beyond the sphere of literary criticism.

Schematically listed, these are sixfold: first, the place of antiquity in modern thinking about the classic from the seventeenth century onwards, and in particular the neoclassical defence of Virgil against the romantic–populist celebration of Homer from the later eighteenth century through into the nineteenth century (especially in Germany); second, the impact of the emerging discipline of comparative philology and the new cultural ethno-nationalisms it both reflected and reinforced—a series of developments that reshaped entirely the loyalties and affiliations associated with the great world library of so-called classics; third, the new cosmopolitanism represented above all by Goethe's ideal of *Weltliteratur* (in many ways a counter to the secular nationalisms fuelled by the philological revolution); fourth, the historiography of the French Romantic period, whose work—crucially on the Middle Ages—fostered a narrative of the making of 'Frenchness' and French cultural identity, which, in contesting the Frankish–Germanist story of the formation of medieval and modern France, sought to recover the prestige of Rome and the heritage of Latinity; fifth, the relation of the classic to reflection on the beginnings of modern mass culture and thus by extension the relation of the classic to democracy, what Sainte-Beuve called the arrival, or more exactly and more anxiously the 'invasion', of literary democracy; sixth, the politics of the classic, whereby an 'imperial' conception (specifically Augustan–Virgilian)

[52] T. S. Eliot, 'What is a Classic?', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 115–31.

was locked onto an image of the modern nation state, a development that was to be taken much further after Sainte-Beuve's death in the thought of the extreme Right.

Taken together, these various contextualizations enable us to see that, when Sainte-Beuve asked the disarmingly simple question 'what is a classic?', a certain *kind* of question was being asked. It might be reasonably objected that Sainte-Beuve's work does not immediately spring to mind as straddling or capable of managing these multiple disciplinary and ideological locations (if any of Sainte-Beuve's French contemporaries could have fitted this bill, it would have been Ernest Renan). But, if Sainte-Beuve had no particular expertise in the more technical of these fields, he was, in varying degrees, familiar with them, and in some cases wrote extensively about them (especially in the fields of classical and medieval studies). Just as important, he was well placed as France's leading professional critic to act as a conduit to a relatively uninformed public through the medium of literary journalism. This was one of the meanings that attached to the notion of criticism as a 'career'. If the latter signified a professional *métier*, a way of earning a living, as well as a degree of literary and scholarly specialization, it could also still be seen as resistance to specialization, the recovery of the belletrist sense of 'letters' and hence of criticism as available to all manner of writing. Not only did Sainte-Beuve feel, irrespective of credentials, unconstrainedly free to write about what happened to come his way; he also made an explicit point of the virtues of such freedom. In acting as a relay, a channel through which ideas would flow to an audience otherwise bereft of access, he took the older notion of the lettered individual and mapped it onto what, in a later idiom, we call the 'public intellectual'. He was not, however, simply a postbox. What he transmitted he did so from a point of view whose aim was to guide as well as to inform. Where did the guide go, and what was it about the notion of the 'classic' that served as the torch lighting his path?

# 2

# The View from Montserrat

## I

In 1868, the year before his death, Sainte-Beuve briefly revisited—in a review of the career of Jean-Jacques Ampère—the early nineteenth-century scene to which they had both belonged as young contributors to *Le Globe*.[1] Here we catch the fading strains of an erstwhile promise-laden enthusiasm. Ampère's scholarly and literary interests reflected the spirit of the new cosmopolitanism that, under the Saint-Simonian banner of free trade, *Le Globe* had championed against the cultural parochialism of the reactionaries. In particular, Sainte-Beuve notes the warm reception accorded to *Le Globe* intellectually and to Ampère in person by Goethe, citing his comment to Eckermann that Ampère was 'plutôt un citoyen du monde qu'un citoyen de Paris' (more a citizen of the world than a citizen of Paris).[2] By the late 1860s the prospects for becoming a citizen of the world struck Sainte-Beuve as somewhat diminished, the outline of a promise aborted by history. Yet the cosmopolitan ideal still held its attractions, registered, for example, in the contrast Sainte-Beuve draws between the internationalist generosity of Ampère and the dogmatically rigid Nisard, who sought to circumscribe the classical tradition of French literature with 'une muraille quasi de Chine autour' (a sort of Chinese wall around it).[3] To be sure, Ampère's wish to be everywhere meant that he was never really anywhere, his incorrigible self-scattering contrasting with Nisard's delivery of a body of critical work that, however ideologically flawed, at least possessed a certain completeness of view.

It is nevertheless Ampère as the embodiment of 'le contraire du chauvinisme en littérature' (the opposite of literary chauvinism)[4] who commands both his attention and his allegiances (the considered assessment of Nisard is to be found elsewhere[5]). The fulsomeness of Sainte-Beuve's tribute doubtless owes much to the association with the magisterial figure of Goethe. Some

[1] On Sainte-Beuve and *Le Globe*, see A. G. Lehmann, *Sainte-Beuve: A Portrait of the Critic 1804–1842* (Oxford, 1962), 21–39.

[2] *NL* xiii. 206. [3] *NL* xiii. 238. [4] *NL* xiii. 226. [5] See Ch. 3.

years earlier (1862) Sainte-Beuve devoted a sequence of three articles to the *Conversations with Eckermann*, in which he described Goethe as 'le plus grand des critiques modernes et de tous les temps' (the greatest modern critic and the greatest of all time).[6] In what precisely this greatness consisted was to receive varying interpretations, but it is clear from several sources (most notably the account of Nisard) that the cross-border perspectives on modern European literature sketched by Goethe constituted one of the criteria. It is perhaps odd, therefore, that in his most extended examination of Goethe as critic, Sainte-Beuve nowhere refers explicitly to the principal literary idea that, in his exchanges with Eckermann, Goethe distinctively shaped from his readings of *Le Globe*—namely, that half-glimpsed possibility situated on the horizon of the future to which he gave the name *Weltliteratur*, and whose conditions of possibility included the transposition to the literary sphere of the eminently Saint-Simonian idea of a *Weltmarkt*.[7] It may be that by the 1860s Sainte-Beuve found the negative effects of the 'market' on high literary culture so appalling that he simply could not go where Goethe appeared to be pointing. It may also be that Sainte-Beuve's internationalist persuasions remained anchored in a predominantly Franco-centric perspective (he salutes Goethe's rejection of German cultural nationalism primarily on the grounds of his professed admiration for French literary life—a compliment that, coming from a Frenchman, might look like a reverse case of the very repudiations for which Goethe is praised).

Yet if in the 1860s Goethe's idea seems to have retreated from view (possibly also because the idea itself remained vague and even incoherent[8]), it was certainly active in the thinking of the younger Sainte-Beuve. In his own Saint-Simonian 'profession de foi' of 1831, he describes the ferment of *Le Globe* as the practical laboratory in which, on Goethe's own admission, the basic components of his idea were first manufactured and assembled: 'Goethe déclarait apercevoir dans cet ensemble de travaux et d'efforts les symptômes d'une *littérature européenne nouvelle*' (Goethe claimed to have perceived in this body of work and effort the symptoms of a *new European literature*).[9] Perhaps

[6] *NL* iii. 265. On Sainte-Beuve and Goethe, see Wolf Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 30–1, 34, 90, 460–1.

[7] In 1827 *Le Globe* announced that Goethe 'entrevoyait l'aurore d'une littérature occidentale ou européenne' (glimpsed the dawn of a Western or European literature) (Stefan Hoesel-Uhlig, 'Changing Fields', in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London, 2004), 37. On the relation between *Weltliteratur* and *Weltmarkt*, see Antoine Berman, *L'Epreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* (Paris, 1984), 92–3.

[8] Hoesel-Uhlig makes the point that it is never entirely clear that what Goethe envisaged under the heading of *Weltliteratur* was a new literature or a set of transactions between already constituted national literatures ('Changing Fields', 31–2).

[9] *Pr.L.* iii. 355 (emphasis in original).

then it was a memory of this ebulliently hopeful moment that survived the ravages of 1848 and the conservative turn they precipitated in Sainte-Beuve's thinking, to inform, if not the actual argument, at least the general spirit of his later—and only—sustained engagement with the question reflected in the title of the 1850 essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. Goethe is quoted no less than three times in the course of the essay, and is moreover the source for the conversion of the time-honoured trope of Mount Parnassus to Montserrat, as the vantage point from which to 'survey' the literatures of the world.[10] Indeed Sainte-Beuve's view is in some respects even more sweeping in its inclusiveness than Goethe's somewhat Eurocentric account. Where Goethe saw world literature as principally a European conversation,[11] Sainte-Beuve reaches further out in time and space to incorporate many authors and texts alongside the predictably self-selecting candidates of a European provenance.

Yet 1850 was not 1831. As one of the earliest of the *Causeries du lundi*, the 1850 article was intimately tied to the personal and political conditions of the post-1848 dispensation. Sainte-Beuve had returned the previous year from Liège with a new conception of his role as a critic participating, through the medium of journalism, in the wider public sphere. In *Ma biographie* Sainte-Beuve categorically maintained that the insurrections had nothing to do with his departure for Belgium ('La révolution de 48 ne me déconcerta point, quoi qu'on en ait dit' (The revolution of 48 did not discountenance me, whatever one might have said)[12]). But it is hard to take him at his word here, given not only what an unidentified 'one' might have said, but also his own very different testimony elsewhere. As the events of '48 unfolded, his letters repeatedly sound the tocsin of a dying civilization, while speaking, with increasing degrees of agitation, of his own need to get out. Here, for example, is Sainte-Beuve writing to his friend, Olivier Lacroix, as the events reached their climax in the June days:

Pendant que vous m'écriviez de si aimables choses, notre pauvre Paris allait être proie aux horreurs. Nous avons eu quatre jours du siège de Saragosse; mais les ennemis étaient de purs brigands et pourtant des voisins, des compatriotes! Nulle sensation n'est plus déchirante. On a l'âme flétrie pour longtemps, et toute idée de bonheur et de joie en cette vie en est mortellement atteinte. On n'a plus foi en l'humanité. Enfin,

[10] 'Goethe, qui est si favorable à libre diversité des génies et qui croit tout développement légitime pourvu qu'on atteigne à la fin de l'art, a comparé ingénieusement le Parnasse au mont Serrat en Catalogne, lequel est ou était tout peuplé d'ermites et dont chaque dentelure recélait son anachorète' (Goethe, so favourable to the free diversity of geniuses and who believes in every legitimate development provided that it serves the ends of art, has ingeniously compared Parnassus to Montserrat in Catalonia, which is or was wholly populated by hermits and whose every peak harboured its recluse) (*CL* iii. 50–1).

[11] See Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* (Port Washington, NY, 1972).

[12] *NL* xiii. 18. See also *Notes et pensées*, *CL* xi. 528–9, and *Mes poisons* (Paris, 1926), 232–3.

nous voilà provisoirement sauvés: mais si un gouvernement ferme et capable ne sort pas de là et ne prend pas vigoureusement en main la cause de la France et des honnêtes gens, il n'y a plus qu'à quitter la ville maudite et à chercher ailleurs un abri.

As you were writing to me of such amiable things, our poor Paris was going to be a prey to horrors. We have had four days of Saragossa siege; but the enemies were pure bandits and yet neighbours, compatriots! No sensation could be more shattering. The soul remains withered for a long time, and all idea of happiness and joy in this life is mortally stricken. One no longer has faith in humanity. At last we have been provisionally saved; but if no strong and capable government emerges from this to take vigorously in hand the cause of France and honest people, there is nothing left but to quit the cursed city and seek a shelter elsewhere.[13]

By the time of his departure (in the autumn of 1848), a form of 'order' was in place (with Cavaignac's crushing of the insurrectionaries), but not yet the 'firm government' that Louis-Napoleon would eventually bring. So off Sainte-Beuve goes anyway to read and lecture in Liège, his state of mind and intentions made clear retrospectively in the introduction to what became the book based on one of his lecture series:

L'année 1848 a été une année folle et fatale. Puisque le monde était en démence, j'ai saisi ce moment aussi de faire mes folies; et mes folies à moi, ça a été d'aller dans un pays ami vivre toute une année avec les illustres et aimables morts, Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, Commynes, Montaigne, tous en foule et à la fois, jusqu'à Buffon et Chateaubriand; de les accueillir en moi, de les entendre, de les interpréter, de me mêler plus intimement que jamais à eux, et d'oublier, s'il se pouvait, dans leur commerce, les sottises et les misères du présent.

The year 1848 has been a mad and fatal year. Since the world had become demented, I seized the moment to indulge also in my own extravagances; and my extravagance was to go and live for a year in a friendly country with the illustrious and amiable dead, Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, Commynes, Montaigne, all together and simultaneously, up until Buffon and Chateaubriand; to welcome them into myself, to listen to them, to interpret them, to fuse more intimately with them than ever before, and, as far as possible, to forget in their company the stupidities and miseries of the present.[14]

[13] *Corr. gén.* vii. 306. In May he wrote to Charles de Mazade: 'La civilisation a baissé de plusieurs crans' (Civilization has dropped by several notches); in June to Mme Théodore Carlier: 'Le plus triste effet de l'espèce de cauchemar social qui pèse sur nous, c'est de supprimer en quelque sorte tous les sentiments agréables de la vie, de faire ajourner toute idée consolante et douce' (The saddest effect of the type of social nightmare that weighs on us is the suppression in some way of all the agreeable sentiments of life, the postponement of all consoling and sweet ideas); again in June to André Sayous of the 'projet général que j'ai formé d'essayer de trouver un abri au sein d'un pays vraiment libre' (the general project I have formed to try to find shelter at the breast of a truly free country) (vii. 283, 298, 299).

[14] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 14.

Turning to the question of the classic one year later was a continuation of this circumstantially imposed withdrawal to the sanctuary of literary *receuillement*. And if we begin with the moment of the writing of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', this is principally because the essay itself begins by highlighting, as an issue in its own right, the 'moment' in which the question of the classic can be properly posed at all. Sainte-Beuve's first words, in response to his interrogative title, are: 'Question délicate'. One reason why it is delicate (in France at least) is because its discussion requires an atmosphere of calm ('pour traiter de tels sujets … il convient de parler dans le calme' (to treat of such subjects … it is advisable to speak in conditions of calm)), and France is not famed for this quality 'même quand elle veut être sage et qu'elle ne fait plus de révolutions' (even when she wishes to be wise and make no more revolutions). Such a moment of calm happens, however, to be to hand, 'un de ces quarts d'heure de silence, de modération et de loisir qui sont rarement accordés à notre aimable France' (one of those quarter hours of silence, moderation, and leisure that are rarely accorded our lovely France)—namely, December 1850, in the aftermath of the 1848 insurrections ('cette catastrophe immense dont nous faisons tous partie et dont nous sommes tous les naufragés' (that immense catastrophe in which we all participate and are all shipwrecked)[15]) and on the cusp of the the Bonapartist *coup d'état* of 1851 (to which Sainte-Beuve will lose no time giving his wholehearted assent).[16]

On the matter of the classic, then, both the question and the possibility of an answer are linked directly to political conditions of address, and specifically the absence or presence of 'revolution'. This may explain why it was above all in France that the question of the 'classic' was posed with such urgency. France was the country in which a classical literary ideology had taken the strongest hold. It also was or became the country most associated with revolution, widely seen as posing a threat to the hegemony of the former. The spectre of revolution shadows the whole of Sainte-Beuve's reflection on the classic in the 1850s and 1860s, and constitutes one of the links spanning the structural and the conjunctural dimensions of that reflection.[17] It also gives the lie to Sainte-Beuve's repeated insistence on the strict separation of the 'literary' and the 'political' in his own critical practice.[18] If that affirmed separation is taken

[15] *CL* i. 313. [16] *CL* iii. 38. [17] I examine this link in greater detail in Chs. 8 and 9.

[18] In the Preface to the *Causeries du lundi*, Sainte-Beuve described his task on taking up his appointment with *Le Constitutionnel* in terms that seek to hive off questions of literature and criticism from politics: 'Comment venir à parler à ce public si nombreux, si divers, pure littérature et pure critique? Comment réussir à l'y intéresser, surtout en ces temps de préoccupation politique et d'orage?' (How to begin talking to a public so numerous, so diverse about pure literature and pure criticism? How to succeed in interesting them in these things, above all at a time when political concerns and stormy passions dominate?) (*CL* i. 1). The

seriously, what, for example, explains the appearance of an article such as 'André Chénier, homme politique'? The answer is to be found in the operation of a double standard: literature and politics can keep each other company when it is a case of the right kind of politics (in Chénier's case, his admirable anti-Jacobinism[19]); it is only the wrong kind that is to be kept at arm's length, and even here, as we shall have much occasion to see later, the political is rarely that far away, especially when Sainte-Beuve finds himself in irascible critical temper.

Nowhere is the disingenuousness of Sainte-Beuve's stance clearer than in the very first move of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. Sainte-Beuve effectively declares his hand, in the sense that his desire to sever the literary from the political succeeds only in showing up how, for him, they are in fact inextricably related. For to claim that the classic and discourse on the classic can thrive only in the absence of civil strife is wish-fulfilment (on the part of someone rocked to his foundations by the events of 1848) rather than serious argument, and flies in the face of historical fact, including facts noted by Sainte-Beuve himself at the time of his flight from the catastrophe of '48. In the opening chapter of *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, we find the record of Sainte-Beuve's musings before his Liège audience on literature and revolution, and specifically the Great Revolution, as fundamentally inhospitable to the creation of Great Works ('en ses années de la Révolution, il n'y avait pas de place pour composer un grand ouvrage' (in those years of revolution there was no space for composing a great work)).[20] But he is also obliged to deal with the fact that his privileged source for the spirit of the 'classic'—ancient Rome—contains a different view of the relation between the artistically creative and the politically tumultuous ('Les Romains … disaient que rien n'était plus favorable à la production des talents que les jours d'orage' (The Romans … maintained that nothing was more favourable to the production

paper itself published an editorial note in September 1849 announcing the start of the *Causeries*, in which it also emphasized the new conditions of political 'calm' as propitious to a renewed interest in literature: 'La littérature ne saurait mourir en France. Elle peut s'éclipser un moment, mais c'est pour reparaître au premier instant de calme … Il suffit que l'orage politique ait fait trêve pour que la société revienne à ce qui l'intéressait dans ses bons moments' (Literature will not die in France. She can be eclipsed for a while, but only to reappear at the first moment of calm … All that suffices is a political truce for society to return to what interested it in its good moments) (i. 6).

[19] An example of the good kind is provided by the discourse of literary criticism during the First Empire: 'la politique, la philosophie étaient en jeu dans les moindres questions littéraires' (politics, philosophy were in play in even the smallest of literary questions) (*CL* i. 375).

[20] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 51. Sainte-Beuve was quite capable of contradicting himself on this point, an exception to the rule made elsewhere in connection with David's great paintings, *Les Horaces*, *Brutus*, et *La Mort de Socrate*, described as 'les trois grandes productions classiques de David' (although there is significantly no mention of *Marat assassiné*) (*NL* viii. 241).

of talents than stormy times)).[21] Confronted with the potentially awkward obstruction of what he calls 'cette assertion classique', Sainte-Beuve simply sweeps it under the carpet and moves briskly on; the Romans are not us, or rather they are like us, but only when they appear in their urbanely Virgilian and Horatian aspects rather than in their robustly 'athletic' guises:

> Cela était vrai pour eux plutôt que pour nous peut-être; c'étaient de rudes athlètes, et plus faits que nous à un antagonisme violent: mais sans contredire ici cette assertion classique … il n'en est pas moins certain que ces époques en dévorent beaucoup avant l'heure de la maturité; et surtout elles effarouchent, elles font rentrer en elles-mêmes ces autres natures tendres, poétiques, rêveuses, si éminemment littéraires. Virgile court risque d'y périr, et Horace attendra que la foudre ait fait silence pour commencer à chanter.
>
> That was true for them rather than for us perhaps; they were robust athletes, and more adapted than us to violent antagonism, but without here contradicting this classical assertion … it remains no less incontrovertible that such epochs devour a very great deal before the moment of maturity; above all they frighten, they force back into themselves those other natures, tender, given to poetic reverie, so eminently literary. Virgil runs the risk of perishing in such times, and Horace will wait until the lightening storm is over before beginning to sing.[22]

This, frankly, is not Sainte-Beuve at his most intellectually impressive. He claims not to 'contradict' ('sans contredire cette assertion classique') what, for contemporary purposes, in practice he is patently contradicting or at the very least eliding. The Roman classic or consciousness of the classic is tailored to fit a tendentious version of modernity. Sainte-Beuve's famed historical sense conveniently deserts him here, in favour of a model of cultural history fuelled by value-laden fantasies that idealize a particular set of social and political conditions as uniquely propitious to literature (precisely those sponsored by the Party of Order under what will shortly become the imperial regime of Louis-Napoleon). These crucially include calm, leisure, and security: 'il faut du loisir, du calme, une certaine sécurité pour l'artiste, un temps de repos de la part du modèle' (what is required is leisure, calm, a certain security for the artist, a time of rest on the part of the model).[23]

[21] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 49 [22] Ibid. i. 50

[23] Ibid. i. 51. Sainte-Beuve concedes that there was a moment that appeared to hold out the possibility of an authentically 'republican' literary culture: 'Pourtant, on saisirait un moment, vers 1795, où la littérature républicaine parut avoir quelque chance de se développer et de s'établir' (Nevertheless we can pinpoint a moment, towards 1795, when a republican literature seemed to have some chance of developing and establishing itself) (i. 53). But the key date here is 1795, the time of the Directory and thus a moment of post-revolutionary consolidation. In this account, republic and revolution are kept firmly apart, a separation carried over to the events of 1848. For example, again in the Chateaubriand book, Sainte-Beuve berates Lamartine for betraying the muse by his involvement in 1848 and its reflection in his *Histoire des Girondins* (i. 235).

'Calm' was to mean many things; most pressingly, an end to disorder within the borders of France, in favour of a new settlement that, among other things, would promote the virtues of the culturally settled, in the form of a return to the reassuring values of a literary past. This brings us closer to understanding why Sainte-Beuve chose to write 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' in 1850: 'calm' is not just the social and political precondition of thinking clearly about the classic; it is a state of mind and polity also actively reinforced by such thinking. Sainte-Beuve's aim is to strengthen the very conditions that enable his own intervention in the first place, to make 'beautiful France', or at least that area of its public sphere he himself occupies, a quieter habitus. This indeed is the *raison d'être* not merely of talk about the classic, but of the classic itself. The argument of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' concedes that the classic can be 'revolutionary'; it can 'upset and shock' received opinion ('ceux qui dérangent et choquent'[24]). But what is given by one hand is taken back by the other:

> Un tel classique a pu être un moment révolutionnaire, il a pu le paraître du moins, mais il ne l'est pas; il n'a fait main basse d'abord autour de lui, il n'a renversé ce qui le gênait que pour rétablir bien vite l'équilibre au profit de l'ordre et du beau.
>
> This kind of classic may well have been revolutionary at a given moment, at least appearing to be such without actually being it; it may have swept all before it, but has overthrown what constrained it only quickly to re-establish equilibrium to the advantage of order and the beautiful.[25]

We note, first, the equivocation, the weakening from 'may well have been' to 'at least appearing to be such'; then the reversal, the re-establishment of the equilibrium, as a process moreover 'quickly' effected. It is a conception that exactly mirrors the desired movement from revolution to stability in society.

In brief, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' is not just a disinterested enquiry into a purely 'literary' question. It is also one of the opening shots of a 'campaign' governed by a very particular agenda.[26] The notion of a campaign may moreover explain one of the truly peculiar inclusions in the category of the classic—namely, the military campaigns of Turenne. The seventeenth-century Marshal appears in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' alongside Racine:

> Turenne dans ses deux dernières campagnes, et Racine dans *Athalie*, voilà les grands exemples de ce que peuvent les prudents et les sages quand ils prennent possession de toute la maturité de leur génie et qu'ils entrent dans leur hardiesse suprême.

[24] *CL* iii. 47. [25] *CL* iii. 42

[26] In an autobiographical note inserted into the *Portraits littéraires*, Sainte-Beuve described 'ma vie littéraire' as conducted 'avec tactique en un mot, comme on fait pour la guerre, et je la divise en campagnes' (in a word, tactically, as one fights wars, and I divide it into different campaigns) (*PL* 707).

Turenne in his two last campaigns and Racine in *Athalie*, here are two great examples of what the prudent and the wise are capable of when they take possession of the full maturity of their genius and accede to their supreme boldness.[27]

Sainte-Beuve had a particular fondness for military figures and their memoirs (they have an honourable place in the family of the 'minor' classic).[28] But what is surprising here is the extension of the family to include the battle itself as distinct from its written record. What then are Turenne and Racine, warfare and tragedy, doing in each other's company? The notion that a battle can be a 'classic', fit to rank with Racinian tragic poetry, suggests a heavily freighted metaphorical undertow to Sainte-Beuve's thinking: namely, that an account of the classic, in the circumstances of 1850, is fundamentally about winning a war (of ideas and values), restoring order, and defending boundaries. Boundaries indeed supply another context for Sainte-Beuve's tropes, 'calm' or 'rest' in the sense of a retrenchment back across frontiers and an end to the vagaries of the 'travelling' or 'wandering' literary spirit. In a later development ('De la tradition'), Goethe himself will be enlisted in the cause of this proposed retreat. But it is already signposted by the dispiriting finale of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' itself. Before encountering this abrupt loss of vitality, however, we should stay with the more expansive mood of the essay's initial moment, if only to be able to take the full measure of this ultimate loss, and thus turn first to Sainte-Beuve's attempt to liberate the term 'classic' from both the congealed weight of past usage and the polemical interests of contemporary usage (or, as Sainte-Beuve puts it, to 'enlarge' its 'spirit').

## II

The essay pivots on what at first sight looks like a contrasting set of definitions: those Sainte-Beuve rehearses only to contest and that which he

[27] *CL* iii. 44. In *Le Génie du christianisme,* Chateaubriand spoke of the world of Louis XIV as having 'un air guerrier et *classique*, conquérant et inspiré des arts' (a warlike appearance, *classical*, conquering, and inspired by the arts) (quoted in Pierre Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques* (Paris, 1952), 7).

[28] 'La littérature classique bien conçue n'a pas seulement à s'occuper des chefs-d'œuvre de la langue, tragédies, épopées, odes, harangues et discours, elle ne néglige pas ses victoires: je veux dire les victoires illustres, celles qui font époque dans la vie des nations … Il y a de ces batailles classiques aussi, dont il faut avoir l'entière intelligence comme on l'a de tout chef-d'œuvre' (Properly conceived, a literary culture of the classic must not only concern itself with the masterpieces of the language, tragedies, epics, odes, speeches, and discourses, it also does not neglect its victories; I mean its illustrious victories, those of epochal significance in the life of nations … There are also classic battles whose clever design we need fully to understand, in the same way that we do with any masterpiece) (*NL* vi. 213–14). For discussion of the category of the 'minor' classic, see Ch. 3.

defends. On the one hand, there is what Sainte-Beuve names as the 'usual' or customary definition: 'Un classique, d'après la définition ordinaire, c'est un auteur ancien, déjà consacré dans l'admiration, et qui fait autorité en son genre' (According to the ordinary definition, a classic is an ancient author, already established as worthy of admiration and who is an authority in his genre).[29] This brief formulation gathers into itself the essential terms of the variable yet interconnected definitions active in French literary criticism from the seventeenth century through to the early nineteenth century. Sainte-Beuve's immediately cited source for this customary definition, however, is Latin rather than French, and, for various reasons, we should pause briefly over it before moving on, with Sainte-Beuve himself, to the principal concerns of his essay. The source is philological, in a reference back to the analogical transfer in ancient Rome of the social term *classicus* (designating the propertied citizen as against the plebeian or 'proletarian') to the literary meaning of a writer who 'counts' ('un écrivain de valeur et de marque'):

Le mot *classique*, pris en ce sens, commence à paraître chez les Romains. Chez eux on appelait proprement *classici*, non tous les citoyens des diverses classes, mais ceux de la première seulement, et qui possédaient au moins un revenu d'un certain chiffre déterminé. Tous ceux qui possédaient un revenu inférieur étaient désignés par la dénomination *infra classem*, au-dessous de la classe par excellence. Au figuré, le mot *classicus* se trouve employé dans Aulu-Gelle, et appliqué aux écrivains: un écrivain de valeur et de marque, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, un écrivain qui compte, qui a du bien au soleil, et qui n'est pas confondu dans la foule des prolétaires. Une telle expression suppose déjà un âge avancé pour qu'il y ait eu déjà comme un recensement et un classement dans la littérature.

The word classic, taken in this sense, appears first in ancient Rome. There the name *classici*, strictly speaking, was given not to all the citizens of the different classes, but only to those of the first class, those who had an income above a certain figure. All those with an inferior income were termed *infra classem*, below the only class that counted. The word *classicus* was used figuratively by Aulus Gellius and applied to writers: a writer of quality and note, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who counts, whose achievements blaze forth, and who is not swallowed up in the proletarian crowd. Such an expression already presupposes an advanced age in which literature has been inventoried and classified.[30]

[29] *CL* iii. 42.

[30] *CL* iii. 38–9. Aulus Gellius is cited in Furetière's dictionary and also by Marsais in the *Encyclopédie* (see Alain Génetiot, 'Des hommes illustres exclus du Panthéon: Les Poètes mondains et galants', in Alain Viala (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? Littératures classiques*, 19 (Paris, 1993), 215). Moreau lists a sixteenth-century usage of the term 'classique' explicitly linked to the social sense of an 'homme d'une classe élevée' (man of high social class) (*Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 1).

This return to origins is not of course an endorsement of original meanings, since Sainte-Beuve is at pains to assure us that his own account of the classic is to be quite different. But nor is it quite an unequivocal rejection of those meanings. Sainte-Beuve notes the definition but does not as such pronounce on it. That he should begin here, in ancient Rome, is more than merely incidental, given his powerful commitment to the model of Latinity, especially of the Augustan–Virgilian sort, in the formation of French cultural identity. Moreover, his one interpretative comment on what otherwise cannot have been for Sainte-Beuve much more than a philological curiosity identifies a major cultural gain: if the idea of the classic originates in a social conception of 'class', its figurative extension to literature is read as a sign of a society's capacity to 'classify' and thus as a sign of civilization, of 'advanced' development. The implication seems to be that, however remote Roman antiquity, it still has a lesson immensely germane to the present or to Sainte-Beuve's construction of it: namely—that the material and social conditions for the production of a 'classic' rest on the division of labour and specialization of function. Just how lively a thought this might have been in Sainte-Beuve's mind at the time of writing the essay is indicated by the reference in the very next paragraph to the Middle Ages as lacking a proper sense of the classic by virtue of a confusion of ranks and orders ('le moyen âge … qui manquait de mesure et de goût, confondit les rangs et les ordres' (the Middle Ages … which lacked a sense of measure and taste, confused ranks and orders)).[31]

This will be one of the great themes of Beuvian cultural criticism, especially in relation to the nineteenth century. What in the conditions of modernity will count as a 'culture' and its symptomatic expression in the writing and reading of classics require an educated, literate elite, protected by a strong, centralized state, and are expressly designed to exclude all trace of the 'proletariat' (in the modern sense) and the developing forms of 'mass' popular literature (what in an earlier essay he had already termed 'littérature industrielle'). This furthermore is not unconnected with the question of Latin and suggests that the appearance of Aulus Gellius is not exclusively driven by an interest in philology and semantic histories. In the revised Dictionary of 1835, the Academicians, after long debate, voted to keep the Latin definition for the entry 'prolétaire', in what was explicitly a determination to keep the modern meaning out.[32] It is unlikely that Sainte-Beuve would have sympathized with this, since the Academy also voted to define the term 'classic' according to the polemical criteria of the reactionary neoclassicists to whom, at least in part, Sainte-Beuve

[31] *CL* iii. 39

[32] Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1984), 600.

is so strenuously opposed in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. He also subsequently wrote a long article on the Academy and the Dictionary in which he made, if in somewhat muted tones, the case for responding flexibly to semantic change.[33] But if it is improbable that Sainte-Beuve would have supported the exclusion of the modern sense of 'prolétaire' from the Dictionary, he was certainly set on excluding the voice of the modern proletariat from the canons of taste the classic was alleged to exemplify. The citing of Aulus Gellius on the non-proletarian character of the classic may therefore have been, if only implicitly and obliquely, associated somewhere in Sainte-Beuve's mind with the view of the radical incompatibility of classic culture and revolutionary politics stressed in the first paragraph of his essay. Having witnessed the contemporary proletariat on the streets and the barricades in 1848 with a mixture of horror and terror, he drew the line firmly between high and low (as we shall see, on the topic of contemporary 'popular' literature, Sainte-Beuve is always a mix of the condescending and the censorious; the literature of or about the lower orders is acceptable into the margins of the canon only on condition that it behave itself [34]).

The relation between social rank and literary rank emphasized in the definition of Aulus Gellius is not, however, one of the explicit preoccupations of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'.[35] What appears to concern Sainte-Beuve at this stage is solely the criterion of literary rank—that is to say, the classic understood as that which elicits 'admiration' and has 'authority' on strictly literary grounds. In these terms, what falls under the heading of the 'usual definition' is an encapsulated history of meanings, from the appraisive to the prescriptive and the normative. It is a history that begins with an association of *classique* (as an adjective) with a work that is eminent or excellent (to be 'admired'); a subsequent association, in the later seventeenth century, of *classique* with works to be taught and studied in the classroom as models of the correct and the perfect (as having 'authority'), generally the works of classical antiquity;[36] and finally, in the early nineteenth century, the enlisting of

[33] See Ch. 3. [34] See Ch. 8.

[35] Ernst Robert Curtius describes this moment in Sainte-Beuve's essay somewhat recklessly: 'What a titbit for a Marxist sociology of literature!' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 250).

[36] See Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 1–8. Moreau distinguishes the sense of *classique* as *éminent* and its sense as *scolaire* in the seventeenth century as, respectively, 'son sens latin et son sens bas-latin' (p. 1), further arguing that partisans of the former meaning viewed the latter with some distaste. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the two meanings have more or less coalesced (p. 7). In his article on Richelieu, Sainte-Beuve alludes to the educational associations of 'classique', describing the chapter on 'letters' in Richelieu's *Testament politique* as the 'curieux chapitre intitulé des Lettres, c'est-à-dire de la littérature classique ou de l'éducation' (curious chapter titled Letters, that is, on the subject of classical literature or education) (*CL* vii. 261).

these ideas and values by academic neoclassical orthodoxy in the nineteenth-century version of the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, where *classique* is polemically annexed to the anti-romantic cause, the historical paradigm for which is the *grand siècle*, the 'classical' works of seventeenth-century France.[37]

There were two strands of thought intertwined with this later nineteenth-century development. One was to exercise considerable influence on Sainte-Beuve's own thinking in the 1850s and 1860s—namely, the decisive move linking the 'classic' to the idea of a *national* classic, in turn the foundation stone of a national literary 'tradition'. Elements of this are already to be found in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', most notably in its passing mention of 'tradition' ('L'idée de classique implique en soi quelque chose … qui fait ensemble et tradition' (The idea of the classic implies in itself something … that makes for coherence and a tradition)) and its focus on the exemplary value, in the French case, of the seventeenth century and the age of Louis XIV ('La meilleure définition est l'exemple: depuis que la France possède son siècle de Louis XIV et qu'elle put le considérer un peu à distance, elle sut ce que c'était qu'être classique' (The best definition is by example: once France had acquired its age of Louis XIV and was able to consider it with some distance, it knew what it was to be classical)).[38] This, however, will be far more centrally and explicitly the theme of Sainte-Beuve's later essay 'De la tradition' (a text we shall examine in some detail in Chapters 3). What preoccupies him more in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' is the second, more dogmatically polemical strand of nineteenth-century academic orthodoxy, which posits the 'classic' and its exemplary seventeenth-century instantiations as merely a storehouse of prescriptive rules and norms for modern writing. This was the definition chosen by the Académie to accompany the entry for 'classique' in the 1835 edition of the Dictionary: the classic as model in the sense of a mechanically

[37] The first uses of *classique* (to mean essentially seventeenth-century French works) in opposition to *romantique* are to be found in Schlegel, Staël, Sismondi, and Stendhal (see Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 6–10, and Patrick Dandrey, 'Les Deux esthétiques du classicisme français', in Viala (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?*, 146). As for the substantive cognate *classicisme*, this is very much a late-comer (it makes no appearance in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* before the 1986 edition, which lists its first uses by Stendhal in *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1817) and then more extensively in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823)). It is not until the 1880s that it became widespread (Sainte-Beuve himself notably does not use the term), in, for instance, the work of Émile Deschanel and Ferdinand Brunetière, although it comes fully into its own only in the early twentieth century, as a rallying cry of the Right, in the writings of Maurras, Lasserre, and Seillière (see René Wellek, 'Classicism in Literature', in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York, 1973), i. 450). Henri Peyre's *Qu'est-ce que le classicisme?* (Paris, 1971) has a chapter headed 'Le Mot classicisme', but is conspicuous for not saying anything at all about the word as such (as distinct from *classique*).

[38] *CL* iii. 40–1. It will be noted here that in certain contexts there are difficulties with translating the term *classique*, on the grounds that the same term covers what in English is distinguished as 'classic' and 'classical'.

transmitted and inflexibly rule-bound literary code. It was, of course, the Académie at its most stiflingly doctrinaire, and Sainte-Beuve will have none of it, citing the definition only to round on it in no uncertain terms:

> Au commencement de ce siècle-ci et sous l'Empire, en présence des premiers essais d'une littérature décidément nouvelle et quelque peu aventureuse, l'idée de classique, chez quelques esprits résistants et encore plus chagrins que sévères, se resserra et se rétrécit étrangement. Le premier Dictionnaire de l'Académie (1694) définissait simplement un auteur classique 'un auteur ancien fort approuvé, et qui fait autorité dans la matière qu'il traite'. Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie de 1835 presse beaucoup plus cette définition, et d'un peu vague qu'elle était, il la fait précise et même étroite. Il définit auteurs classiques ceux 'qui sont devenus modèles dans une langue quelconque'; et, dans tous les articles qui suivent, ces expressions de modèles, de règles établies pour la composition et le style, de règles strictes de l'art auxquelles on doit se conformer, reviennent continuellement. Cette définition du classique a été faite évidemment par les respectables académiciens, nos devanciers en présence et en vue de ce qu'on appelait le romantique, c'est-à-dire en vue de l'ennemi. Il serait temps, ce me semble, de renoncer à ces définitions restrictives et craintives, et d'en élargir l'esprit.
>
> At the beginning of this century and during the Empire, when we had before us the first attempts at a decidedly new and somewhat adventurous literature, certain tough-minded persons, disgruntled rather than stern, produced an oddly shrunken and narrow idea of the classic. The first Dictionary of the Academy (1694) had defined a classic author as 'an ancient author who is much approved and an authority in the matter he treats'. The Dictionary of the Academy of 1835 presses much harder on this definition, and from what was originally vague, has made it far more precise and even narrow. It defines as classic writers those 'who have become *models* in a given language', and, in all the articles that follow, these expressions—models, rules established for composition and style, strict rules of art to which one must conform—return again and again. Clearly, this definition of the classic was drawn up by the worthy academicians, our forerunners confronted with what was called the romantic, that is to say, the enemy. It seems to me to be time to renounce such restrictive and timorous definitions and to broaden its spirit.[39]

But, while attracting the full weight of Sainte-Beuve's scorn, this was a relatively easy target. More complex was an associated view of the defining properties of the classic illustrated by writers such as Horace, Boileau, and Pope, where the emphasis falls exclusively on the virtues of *régularité*, *sagesse*, *modération*, and *raison*, linked to what Sainte-Beuve terms 'la théorie latine'—also 'pendant

[39] *CL* iii. 41–2. In the later piece, 'De la tradition', Sainte-Beuve also dissociates himself from the Academicians: 'ceux qui, au commencement de ce siècle, s'intitulaient exclusivement classiques étaient, dans la querelle d'alors, ceux qui l'étaient le moins' (those who at the beginning of this century identified themselves as exclusively the classicists, in the quarrel of that time, were it the least) (*CL* xv. 373).

longtemps la théorie française'—of the classic.[40] We shall have occasion to return to the changing fortunes of this emphasis in Sainte-Beuve's criticism. Here it is seen as having a rightful place in the flexibly accommodating definition he himself will propose, but only on condition that it divest itself of its absolutizing claims as the sole set of viable criteria. What then does Sainte-Beuve offer as an alternative approach, what are the terms of the enlarged and enlarging view of the meaning of the 'classic'?

> Un vrai classique, comme je l'aimerais entendre définir, c'est un auteur qui a enrichi l'esprit humain, qui en a réellement augmenté le trésor, qui lui a fait faire un pas de plus, qui a découvert quelque vérité morale non équivoque, ou ressaisi quelque passion éternelle dans ce cœur où tout semble connu et exploré; qui a rendu sa pensée, son observation ou son invention, sous une forme n'importe laquelle, mais large et grande, fine et sensée, saine et belle en soi; qui a parlé à tous dans un style à lui et qui se trouve aussi celui de tout le monde, dans un style nouveau sans néologisme, nouveau et antique, aisément contemporain de tous les âges.
>
> A true classic, as I would like to hear it defined, is an author who has enriched the human mind, who has really increased its resources, who has brought it to take one step more, who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or has recaptured some eternal passion in this heart where all seemed known and explored; who rendered his thought, his observation, or his invention, in whatever form, but a form wide and grand, fine and meaningful, healthy and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own and which happens to be also that of everyone, in a new style without neologism, new and old, effortlessly contemporaneous with all ages.[41]

One can, I imagine, take very different views of this cascading sentence, on a spectrum from the 'splendid' (as Antoine Compagnon puts it[42]) to the vacuous. It is certainly the case that its generalized form contains little that is precise and could well be construed as little more than a string of platitudes. On the other hand, in its generalized form, and in particular its stress on the universal reach of the true classic, it does in principle open the Pantheon to all comers, irrespective of borders and origins. And indeed, in the first moment of Sainte-Beuve's essay, that is what is on offer, through the figure of Mount Parnassus, subsequently modified (under the influence of a source in Goethe) to Montserrat. The view from the mountain makes possible a *tour d'horizon* or what Sainte-Beuve himself calls 'un tour du monde', thus at a figurative stroke expansively installing the question of the classic in the category of the 'world' classic. What '[s]ur la colline' we are invited to contemplate is a free-strolling community of writers brought together in a manner that

[40] *CL* iii. 44. [41] *CL* iii. 42.

[42] Antoine Compagnon, 'Sainte-Beuve and the Canon', *Modern Language Notes*, 110 (1995), 1190.

transcends the boundaries of nation (and thus the construction of literature as essentially national literature): 'En général les nations diverses y auraient chacune un coin réservé, mais les auteurs se plairaient à en sortir, ils iraient en se promenant reconnaître, là où il s'y attendraient le moins, des frères ou des maîtres' (In general, the different nations would each have a corner of its own, but its authors would feel free to step outside, they would stroll freely, recognizing where they least expected it brothers and teachers).[43]

This does indeed propose a genuinely cosmopolitan view of the classic, in which we catch an echo of Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*. But, in terms of the comparison with Goethe, there remain important differences of conception. In the first place, where Goethe is describing, however hesitantly and incompletely, what he perceives as real processes centred on the historical emergence of a new international marketplace of circulation and exchange (its material conditions include 'translations, the success of foreign reviews as well as a growing international booktrade'[44]), Sainte-Beuve's world tour is a critical fiction, entirely internal to the conceit of the view from the mountain. It is cognate with that other, structural fiction that underlies the *Causeries du lundi* as a whole—the image of the *Causeries* as a kind of labyrinth in which all sorts of ostensibly improbable encounters take place. Secondly, where Goethe models *Weltliteratur* as acts of exchange across the barrier of difference, each literature taking from others in a set of mutually enriching transactions, Sainte-Beuve construes his mountainside strolls more on the analogy of a meeting, a meeting of minds, of like with like. In other words, his conceit is a fiction for the staging of a taxonomy in which 'masters' and 'brothers' come together within the families to which they naturally, if unexpectedly, belong, the variable kinship patterns united in one grand ('noble') family governed by the universals of the human mind ('l'esprit humain').[45]

We may put this another way: Goethe's idea is open-ended, not merely because it is incompletely formulated but also because, being oriented to a hazily emergent future, the permutations of exchange are theoretically indefinite. Sainte-Beuve's gathering, by contrast, is a more closed affair, a gathering of writers and texts that is first and foremost a selection, a corpus derived from the heritage of the past. In many ways, the implicit model is closer to Rivarol's constituted library of mankind ('une bibliothèque idéale

[43] *CL* iii. 53. [44] Hoesel-Uhlig, 'Changing Fields', 36.

[45] Sainte-Beuve's fiction may be more accurately described as a mix of the modern, naturalistic model of the 'families of minds' sketched in the article on Deschanel and an older convention active from the Italian Renaissance to the seventeenth century, the prosopopeia of the 'dialogue des morts'; on the latter, see Marc Fumaroli, 'Les Abeilles et les araignées', in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq (Paris, 2001), 42.

du genre humain' (an ideal library of mankind)[46]) than to Goethe's more dynamic *Weltmarkt*. Sainte-Beuve's proposal is to rebuild the Temple of Taste, but in the sense of enlarging the Pantheon, making it a more spacious structure while leaving its essential forms and functions intact, rather than subjecting its foundations to the tremors of new market forces:

> Le Temple du goût, je le crois, est à refaire; mais, en le rebâtissant, il s'agit simplement de l'agrandir, et qu'il devienne le Panthéon de tous les nobles humains, de tous ceux qui ont accru pour une part notable et durable la somme des jouissances et des titres de l'esprit.
>
> The Temple of Taste, I believe, needs to be rebuilt; but, in rebuilding it, the task is merely to enlarge it, for it to become the Pantheon of all the noble minds of mankind, of all who have had a notable and durable share in increasing the sum of the pleasures and possessions of the mind.[47]

The underlying idea is close in spirit to the construction of what today we call the 'canon'.[48]

We might then want to take a tally of which authors and texts are explicitly mentioned as members of the Pantheon. The list (in alphabetical order) is as follows: Addison, Aeschylus, Andrieux, Ariosto, Boccaccio, Bossuet, Buffon, Cervantes, Chénier, Confucius, Corneille, Dante, Demosthenes, Fénelon, Firdawsi, Goldsmith, Hesiod, Homer, Horace, The Book of Job, La Bruyère, La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld, Lucretius, Menander, Milton, Molière, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Pellisson, Plato, Pope, Racine, Rousseau, Shakespeare, Solomon, Solon, Sophocles, Tasso, Terence, Theognis, Tibullus, Valmiki, Vauvenargues, Virgil, Voltaire, Vyasa, Xenephon. Although one cannot fail to be struck, first, by its Gallo-centric bias and, secondly—as so often was Proust—by Sainte-Beuve's incorrigible ability to reach for the mediocre (Andrieux? Pellisson?) at the very moment he expatiates on the major, this, all things considered (which must of course include consideration of the limits of the essay form[49]), is quite an impressive list. We should not therefore read too much into what is excluded from this roll-call of the great and the

[46] Quoted in Jean Granarolo, 'Du classicisme libéral de Sainte-Beuve', *Présence de Virgile*, ed. R. Chevallier (Paris, 1978), 537.

[47] *CL* iii. 50.

[48] Compagnon is quick to observe, in respect of his own title ('Sainte-Beuve and the Canon') that the 'title is a misnomer. The word *canon* makes little or no sense in French, but stands as a neologism borrowed from English' (p. 1188). This is broadly true, but, in the review of Taine, Sainte-Beuve himself uses the term, albeit in relation to literary criticism rather than literature as such (*NL* viii. 67).

[49] Sainte-Beuve was conscious of this constraint: 'Je ne veux pas continuer ici plus longtemps cette description qui, si elle était complète, tiendrait tout un livre' (I do not propose to continue further with this description which, were it to be complete, would take up a whole book) (*CL* iii. 53).

good: randomly (and to stay within purely European parameters), Euripides, Catullus, Chaucer, Petrarch, Villon, Rabelais, Erasmus, Pascal, Donne, Dr Johnson, Diderot (others may add their own candidates).

Objections to these exclusions would be pointless. This is not, after all, Sainte-Beuve's equivalent of Harold Bloom's listed membership of the Western canon. But there is one crucial respect in which the omissions tell us much about the restricted horizons of the view from Montserrat—namely, the terms of its opening to the non-European literatures of the world, and crucially those of the East. There is nothing from Japan, a token inclusion of China (Confucius is there, albeit placed somewhat grudgingly on one of the lower slopes: 'et pourquoi pas Confucius lui-même?' (and why not Confucius himself?)) and a gesture towards the Semitic cultures of what we now call the Middle East ('les Solon … les Job, les Salomon').[50] Pride of place, however, is granted to Valmiki, Vyasa, and Firdawsi—that is, to writers in two of the languages—Sanskrit and Persian—that, largely through the discipline of comparative linguistics, had been 'discovered' and held to belong to the great Indo-European family of languages:

> Homère, comme toujours et partout, y serait le premier, le plus semblable à un Dieu; mais derrière lui, et tel que le cortège des trois rois mages d'Orient, se verraient ces trois poètes magnifiques, ces trois Homères longtemps ignorés de nous, et qui ont fait, eux aussi, à l'usage des vieux peuples d'Asie, des épopées immenses et vénérées, les poètes Valmiki et Vyasa des Indous, et le Firdousi des Persans.
>
> Homer, as always and everywhere, would come first, the closest to being a god; but behind him, like the procession of the three magi, would be seen those three magnificent poets, those three Homers so long unkown to us, who themselves also composed, for the ancient peoples of Asia, epics immense and venerated, the poets Valmiki and Vyasa the Hindus, and Firdawsi the Persian.[51]

In these terms, the view from the mountain is thus skewed to the Indo-European perspective and the corresponding version of the 'world' classic weighted in favour of what by the 1850s had become well established as the nineteenth-century Aryanist narrative. In fact, Sainte-Beuve remained on the whole relatively detached from the ideologies of nineteenth-century Indo-Europeanism, and especially that Germanist variant of it in which philology and historiography start to converge alarmingly on questions of nationality, ethnicity, and 'race'. He was far too wedded to the (partly) competing values of Latinity to be able to subscribe wholeheartedly to the Sanskrit–Persian–Teutonic equation that underpinned the more tribal enthusiasms of some of his contemporaries.[52] Yet, here with Sainte-Beuve

[50] *CL* iii. 51 [51] *CL* iii. 51. [52] See Ch. 4.

on the mountain, we might be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Not only is the revealing analogy with the three magi consistent with the Germano-Christian thread of nineteenth-century cultural history, but the assimilation of the Sanskrit and Persian writers to an ancient tradition of epic commanded by the prestige of Homer reflects a determined effort to keep the 'classic' in the relevant family. This is perhaps particularly significant in connection with the medieval Persian writer, Firdawsi. It is of course a wildly inaccurate anachronism to include Firdawsi among those who wrote 'for the ancient peoples of Asia', and only the Indo-Europeanist in-gathering could account for this bizarre historical ellipsis. Sainte-Beuve also wrote a separate article on Firdawsi, the main drift of which was to rescue him from the radical otherness of the 'Orient' ('en passant dans le monde oriental où tout nous est étranger' (in entering the oriental world where everything is strange for us)) by domesticating him. Firdawsi is made to become one of 'us', in a breathless list of analogies with authors, texts, and characters from European literature (Homer, Jacob, Hercules, Medea, Roland, Othello, Racine, Ossian, and Voltaire) so implausibly opportunistic as to suggest that this is more than a simple journalistic device for introducing the exotic to the readers of *Le Constitutionnel* within a familiar frame of cultural reference.[53]

## III

In terms of the allegedly global purview of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', this does rather look like a determined effort to discriminate orientalisms, in order to keep the Semitic orient at the edge of, or even altogether out of, the picture (there is not, for example, a single reference to the Koran). In the case of some of the exclusions, one might plead the personal contingencies and cultural contexts of ignorance. But this would surely not have held for Arabia and Islam (or, for that matter, China), since a wide variety of materials had long been in circulation.[54] In fact, on this front, Sainte-Beuve seems to have succumbed

[53] *CL* i. 332–50.

[54] Sacy's *Chrestomathie arabe*, published between 1806 and 1827, was widely circulated, though, since Sacy defended his use of fragments on the grounds that Arabic poetry lacked aesthetic finish and wholeness, perhaps it is not Sainte-Beuve's fault that this source would not have encouraged inclusion in the Pantheon (see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979), 123–30). A translation of the Koran appeared in Pauthier's *Livres sacrés de l'Orient* (1841). Pauthier (whom Sainte-Beuve knew personally), along with Rémusat, Stanislas, and Bazin, 'gave currency to a certain idea of Chinese fiction and drama' (Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 99). Compagnon notes that Sainte-Beuve 'raises his hat'

to the less reputable preconceptions of his age, as a thin and tedious footnote to the story of nineteenth-century Islamic orientalism (its thinness the only consolation for the tedium). In his sporadic forays into a variety of orientalist sources—military, political, ethnological—we find most of the characteristic figures and stereotypes. Inevitably there is the trope of the 'desert' (which Renan was notoriously to use in his account of the Semitic languages and cultures) associated with aridity and inertia: 'la race dite sémitique, habitante du désert et de l'antique Arabie … comme anéantie sous la main souveraine en face d'un ciel d'airain' (the so-called Semitic race, inhabitants of the desert and ancient Arabia … as if annihilated beneath a sovereign power before a sky of bronze) is how Sainte-Beuve puts it in 'L'Anthologie grecque'.[55] The trope is repeated in the curious article on Duvéyrier's study of the Touaregs, where Sainte-Beuve also discriminates between two kinds of Islam. There is the fanatical sort ('de purement fanatiques'), unconscionably opposed to colonial rule ('Notre conquête de l'Algérie lui a fourni une belle matière et un point de mire excitant' (Our conquest of Algeria has furnished him with fine subject matter and an exciting target)), and the hospitable sort, 'humains, tolérants, non exclusifs' (human, tolerant, non-exclusive), warmly disposed to 'tendre la main à une civilisation autre que la leur; comme qui dirait des musulmans à la Cheverus ou à la Fénelon' (extending their hand to a civilization other than their own; as one might say, Muslims à la Cheverus or à la Fénelon).[56] Fénelonesque Islam is clearly the more congenial variant, agreeable because agreeable to us.

Comparable thoughts inform his account of Horace Vernet as painter of North Africa. Vernet gives us the charming and picturesque qualities of the 'immobile' Orient ('Cette immobilité, cette invariabilité de l'Orient au point de vue pittoresque du spectacle' (That immobility, that unchanging nature of the Orient from the pictorial point of view of the spectacle)[57]), but is also the artist who commendably resists the temptation of going native, who never forgets that he is a European and a Frenchman:

> Horace … ne se fait pas Arabe et Turc, au point de laisser de côté tous ses sentiments d'Europe; il ne ressemble pas à ces voyageurs … qui, en mettant le pied sur la terre d'Orient, se font autant et plus Orientaux que les Orientaux eux-mêmes.
>
> Horace … does not make himself into an Arab or a Turk, to the point of abandoning all his European sentiments; he does not resemble those travellers … who, once they set foot on Oriental soil, make themselves as much, or more, Oriental than the Orientals themselves.[58]

to 'all the Orient' (before then 'hurrying away'), but even this cursory salute is by no means directed to 'all' the Orient ('Sainte-Beuve and the Canon', 1194).

[55] *NL* vii. 42. [56] *NL* ix. 122–3. [57] *NL* v. 102. [58] *NL* v. 94.

This admirable self-restraint is especially important to Vernet's pictures of the colonial military campaigns and their quiet celebration of the techno-aesthetic beauties of the French army in pacifying action. In this, Vernet reminds Sainte-Beuve of the military chief of the Algerian campaigns in the 1840s, Maréchal Saint-Arnaud ('un homme du même jet et de la même sève' (a man of the same cast and the same sap)[59]), the publication of whose letters was also to be reviewed by Sainte-Beuve, eliciting the comparison of Saint-Arnaud with Villehardouin:

> Ses lettres … sont tout naturellement une des productions les plus agréables de cet esprit français si vif, si net, si improvisé, et qui n'a jamais fait faute en aucun temps à nos hommes de guerre, à remonter jusqu'au vieux Villehardouin.
>
> His letters … are entirely naturally one of the most agreeable productions of that French spirit, so lively, so free-wheeling, and which our warriors have never lacked, all the way back to old Villehardouin.[60]

Villehardouin was to get his own encomium in which Sainte-Beuve defended the Crusades against Daunou's 'Voltairian' depreciation of them.[61]

The most extended display of these ways of thinking came in the famous review of Flaubert's *Salammbô*. This is best known for its adverse comments on Flaubert's 'method': the novel fails as a novel by virtue of its antiquarian approach; in viewing Carthage entirely from the outside, as an object of 'research', Flaubert reconstructs rather than recreates. This criticism was later picked up by Lukács, at once citing and sharing Sainte-Beuve's view of the consequences of the externalist method.[62] The question of method is not, however, the only ground of their respective objections to the novel. A further set of considerations links method to object: if Flaubert cannot get imaginatively inside the world of Carthage, it is because that world is entirely alien to the European imagination of the nineteenth century. For Lukács the point here is essentially a historical one: the world of Carthage is too historically remote; it lacks a connection with the 'living present' of the type reflected in the historical novels of Scott and Balzac.[63] This also echoes one of Sainte-Beuve's themes:

[59] *NL* v. 90 [60] *CL* xiii. 452.

[61] *CL* ix. 404–5. For discussion of Sainte-Beuve's difference with Daunou, see Janine Rosalind Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851–1900* (Oxford, 1973), 33. Reviewing the account of the colonizing of Algeria by D'Ault-Dumesnil, Sainte-Beuve quotes with approval (as 'idées' that 'méritent d'être méditées') the former's conception of colonial conquest: 'Il a vu, dès l'abord, dans l'entreprise, une conquête de la civilisation chrétienne sur la barbarie' (He grasped immediately the point of the enterprise as the victory of Christian civilization over barbarism) (*Pr.L.* ii. 82).

[62] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, 1976), 221–36.

[63] 'But what can a world thus re-awakened mean to us?' (ibid. 222).

L'Antiquité … ne comporte pas, de notre part, le roman historique, proprement dit, qui suppose l'entière familiarité et l'affinité avec le sujet. Il y a, d'elle à nous … un abîme. L'érudition, qui peut y jeter un pont, nous refroidit en même temps et nous glace. On ne peut recomposer la civilisation antique de cet air d'aisance et la ressusciter tout entière; on sent toujours l'effort ou le jeu, la marqueterie. On la restitue, l'Antiquité, on ne la ressuscite pas.

For our part, Antiquity does not go with the historical novel properly speaking, which presupposes complete familiarity and affinity with the subject matter. Between it and us there is … an abyss. Scholarship can build a bridge to it, but at the same time chills and freezes the subject for us. One cannot effortlessly recompose and fully resuscitate ancient civilization; one senses always the effort or the skill, the workmanship. One reconstitutes Antiquity, one does not resuscitate it. [64]

For Sainte-Beuve, however, the remoteness of Carthage is not only historical; it is also cultural. Stories of carnage in North Africa are radically other to 'our' cultural frame of reference; they have no business in 'our' literature, and the principal reason they have no business in our literature is that they reflect a form of life so mired in barbarism as to be virtually unrecognizable to our sense of what it is to be human.

En présence de ce roman ou de ce poème tout archéologique, c'est le cas ou jamais de le redire: l'art, nonobstant toute théorie, l'art dans sa pratique n'est pas une chose purement abstraite, indépendante de toute sympathie humaine; et je prends le mot de *sympathie* dans son acception la plus vaste. Comment voulez-vous que j'aille m'intéresser à cette guerre perdue, enterrée dans les défilés ou les sables d'Afrique, à la révolte de ces peuplades lybiennes et plus ou moins autochtones contre leurs maîtres, les Carthaginois, à ces mauvaises petites haines locales de barbare à barbare? Que me fait, à moi, le duel de Tunis et de Carthage? Parlez-moi du duel de Carthage et de Rome, à la bonne heure! j'y suis attentif, j'y suis engagé. Entre Rome et Carthage, dans leur querelle acharnée, toute la civilisation future est en jeu déjà; la nôtre elle-même en dépend, la nôtre dont le flambeau s'est allumé à l'autel du Capitole, comme la civilisation romaine s'était lui-même allumée à l'incendie de Corinthe.

Confronted with this essentially archeological novel or poem, it needs to be said now or never: art, notwithstanding any theory to the contrary, the practice of art is not a purely abstract thing, independent of all human sympathy; and I take the word *sympathy* in its widest possible sense. How can you expect me to take an interest in this lost war, buried in the defiles or sands of Africa, in the rebellion of these more or less indigenous Libyan tribes against their masters the Carthaginians, in these petty local hatreds between barbarians. What does it matter to me, this duel of Tunis and Carthage? Speak to me of the duel of Carthage and Rome, and at once I am all attention, I am involved. In the bitter quarrel

[64] *NL* iv. 80

between Rome and Carthage, the whole of future civilization is already in play; our own itself depends on it, our own whose torch was lighted at the altar of the Capitol, just as the light of Roman civilization itself came from the fire of Corinth.[65]

In this passage we encounter a moment of quite startlingly frank critical and cultural brutality. The complaint turns not on the necessarily limited sympathies of the contingently located Sainte-Beuve (for there is, after all, a limit to what any historically situated being can imaginatively grasp), but on a claim about the character of Carthage itself. Carthage suffers from a double and related set of disabilities: at once provincial (the antipathy of the classic to the 'provincial' is one of Eliot's principal themes) and barbaric, it is beyond the reach of human *sympathie* as such. Only in relation to the far grander violence of imperial Rome, the *fons et origo* of 'our' civilization, can the violence of Carthage properly accede to literary representation.[66] Moreover, having already locked the door to an unregenerate Orient, Sainte-Beuve gives two further turns to the key. First, he does not dispute that the 'Orient' can have a place in the European literary imagination, but on condition that it is accorded that place on the model of a 'conquest': 'Je suis loin de prétendre interdire aux artistes l'entrée et la conquête poétique de cet Orient, dans lequel, dit-on, l'état mental est un peu différent du nôtre' (I am far from presuming that artists are prohibited from poetically entering and conquering this Oriental world, whose mental universe, it is said, is somewhat different from our own). Being mentally different, Orientals can, generally speaking, be granted only the literary mode of 'fantasy' ('je suis prêt à accorder beaucoup à la singularité et à la fantaisie' (I am prepared to grant a great deal to singularity and fantasy)). Serious art, however, remains predicated on 'sympathy', and sympathy can be aroused only when art depicts people like us—that is, human beings as distinct from 'monsters': 'Mais encore une fois, je le maintiens, l'art ne saurait être totalement indépendant de la sympathie, et portant tout entier sur des monstres. Si vous voulez nous attacher, peignez-nous nos semblables ou nos analogues; cherchez bien et vous en trouverez, même là-bas' (But yet again I maintain that art cannot be wholly independent of sympathy and directed entirely to

[65] *NL* iv. 84

[66] *NL* iv. 84. This was something of a period commonplace (see, for instance, Michelet's views on the Punic Wars). For a dissident view, see Benjamin Constant: 'Si la lutte s'établissait maintenant entre Rome et Carthage, Carthage aurait pour elle les voeux de l'univers. Elle aurait pour alliés les mœurs actuelles et le génie du monde' (If there were a re-run today of the struggle between Rome and Carthage, Carthage would have the support of all. She would have as allies the present customs and the guiding genius of the world) (*De l'esprit de conquête*, in *Œuvres* (Paris, 1957), 994).

monsters. If you wish to engage us, then paint our fellow creatures or those who are like us; look thoroughly, and you will find them, even down there).[67]

The insufferably condescending 'même là-bas' looks like a concession, a reverse half-turn of the key, but it is a deceptive concession. Its purpose is to prepare the second additional move in closing down the Oriental other. For, on Sainte-Beuve's resolutely ethnocentric assumptions, there is a problem: what to do with the example of the Bible, specifically the Semitic provenance of the Old Testament? On the standard ethnocentric account of where 'our' civilization comes from, the Bible has *droit de cité* as much as does, say, Virgil. Sainte-Beuve coolly covers his tracks here, by the simple expedient of distinguishing the moral universe of the Old Testament from that of the Carthage of Flaubert's *Salammbô*. The latter is pure violence; the former, however, also contains specimens of humanity that, in the midst of tales of horror and carnage, are also capable of inspiring the requisite sentiments of mental rest and consolation:

> La Bible, dont je sais que vous vous autorisez, vous et d'illustres Sémitiques avec vous, pour conclure de là à la Phénicie et ensuite à Carthage (ce qui ne laisse pas d'être un peu loin), la Bible est remplie de scènes et de figures qui, au milieu des duretés et des épouvantements, reposent et consolent.
>
> The Bible, whose authority I know you, along with several illustrious Semiticists, take to justify turning to Phoenicia and then to Carthage (which is nevertheless going a bit far), the Bible is full of scenes and figures that, in the midst of so much that is harsh and terrifying, are restful and consoling.[68]

There is not much we can do with all this other than consign it to one of the intellectually drabber corners of the nineteenth-century Orientalist world mapped by Edward Said. In the more general structure of the argument, it would seem then to be merely a matter of rearranging the field slightly so as to incorporate the role of the 'classic' in its construction, but in a manner that leaves the basic geography of the terrain intact. On the question of the classic and its 'others', Sainte-Beuve simply replays the conventional distinction between a good Orient (the Indic variety), good because like 'us', a member of the family, and a bad Orient (the Semitic, excluding the Hebrew Old Testament), bad because remote, not one of us. Yet, in placing Sainte-Beuve as a dreary footnote to a dispiriting tale, we are at risk of misconstruing the real centre of his concerns. His apparent indifference, modulating in places to

[67] *NL* iv. 85. Flaubert's reply was polite but categorical: 'Rien de plus compliqué qu'un Barbare' (nothing more complicated than a Barbarian) (his letter reprinted by Sainte-Beuve as an appendix to his review (*NL* iv. 436) ).

[68] *NL* iv. 5.

outright hostility, to the Semitic Near East does not rest on the same grounds as those to be found elsewhere in the nineteenth century. I have already hinted that, despite the welcoming embrace extended to the Sanskrit and Persian epics, Sainte-Beuve had reasons of his own for elsewhere taking a more measured and distanced attitude to the Indo-Aryan enthusiasms of some of his contemporaries, principally because one of the explicit, programmatic aims of the Sanskrit–Greek–Teutonic alignment was to challenge and dislodge the privileged position of Latinity and, in terms of modern literary history, the prestige accorded to France (this, for instance, was one of the declared aims of the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Schlegel being, of course, one of the founding pioneers of the adaptation of philological research to Aryanist fantasies of a return to 'roots', both linguistic and cultural). Sainte-Beuve could not go down this road because for him ultimately much, perhaps even all, was staked on the Latin model and the aura of Rome.

Perhaps therefore we should attend to Raymond Schwab's interesting and somewhat heterodox interpretation of Sainte-Beuve's review of *Salammbô* as 'a new instalment of the battle between the ancients and the moderns in which the meaning of the two terms is now reversed, the moderns making common cause with classical antiquity against the intrusion of the primordial East'.[69] On this reading, Sainte-Beuve's scepticism is directed not so much to the specifically Semitic sphere of the Orientalist map as to the more general category of the Primitive (the 'primordial'), in all its forms, including its Indic–Asiatic variant. The countervailing attachment to classical antiquity (Schwab refers here to 'worshippers of Athena', though, for Sainte-Beuve, it is in fact Rome that is the key reference) as a point of resistance to the new primitivism was thus a conservative move with a difference, one that displaced or even reversed the ground of the ancient/modern dispute: to be an ancient, in this context, was also to be a modern in the sense that a Eurocentric prejudice was also, if only in part, a defence of the Enlightenment suspicion of darkly irrationalist fervours, whatever their provenance.

There is evidence in support of this view of Sainte-Beuve's stance from various sources (many of which we shall encounter in subsequent chapters), but, for now, we might briefly dwell on the bizarrely ornate yet ideologically symptomatic terms of Sainte-Beuve's characterization of the style of Edgar Quinet (no great friend of Roman imperialism). The conceit is not intended as a compliment: Quinet writes 'à la manière d'une invasion d'Arabes quand il est brillant, d'une invasion de Huns ou de Hulans quand il est sombre: ce ne sont pas des victories romaines' (in the manner of an invasion of Arabs when brilliant, and of an invasion of Huns or Hulans when dark; these are not

[69] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 107.

Roman victories).[70] Here we find both Arabs and Huns, the Semitic nomads of the desert and the barbarian tribes of the North, as the figures of a mode of writing that violates the legacy of Rome, itself defined as 'ami surtout de la culture polie, studieuse, élaborée et perfectionnée, de la poésie des siècles d'Auguste' (close above all to a culture that is polite, studious, developed, and perfected, to the poetry of the age of Augustus).[71] Although in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' Sainte-Beuve warns against a rigidly doctrinaire assertion of what he calls 'la théorie latine', his location of the true spirit of the classic in the legacy of the Augustan imperium will remain a repeated stress of his work from 1850 onwards (it will come into particularly strong focus in his 1858 essay 'De la tradition' and in the Collège de France lectures, subsequently published as *Étude sur Virgile*.

## IV

Distinguishing this approach to the 'others' of Europe and France is thus not in any way to attenuate the imperialist strain in Sainte-Beuve's thinking, but rather to place it on a very particular axis. It should not be forgotten that legitimating representations of the French colonial presence in North Africa often echoed the assumptions of Sainte-Beuve's review of *Salammbô*, in particular the notion that Flaubert's novel might have succeeded in claiming the attention of the reader had it dealt instead with the Punic wars. He may have derived this thought from the article published by Saint-Marc Girardin nine years earlier in the *Revue des deux mondes*, in which he proposed a direct parallel between Carthage/Rome and North Africa/France (it is perhaps of more than incidental interest that the very first of the *Causeries du lundi* was devoted to the writings of Girardin).[72] Girardin's opportunistic superimposition of Rome on contemporary France supplies an important framework for understanding many of the contexts to which Sainte-Beuve's conception of the 'classic'

[70] *PC* ii. 324. [71] *PC* ii. 325.

[72] 'Les plus beaux jours de l'Afrique sont assurément ceux de la domination romaine' (Africa's finest hour was assuredly that of the Roman domination)—an example from which the French would do well to learn, albeit that the task of the modern colonizer is much harder than it was for the Romans (Saint-Marc Girardin, 'De la domination des Carthaginois et des Romains en Afrique comparée avec la domination française', *Revue des deux mondes*, 4/26 (1841), 421–2). The parallel was to figure once again in late-nineteenth-century right-wing circles, most notably in the writings of Louis Bertrand, who argued that the Roman defeat of Carthage inaugurated the making of an *Afrique latine* momentarily disrupted by the Arab invasions of the seventh century. The colonizing of Algeria was thus the recovery of a natural kinship based on common Latin roots.

belongs. The invocation of Rome was ultimately a recipe for closing out the beyond and staying at home.

Amongst other things, this was to generate, despite the prodigious stamina and vast reading that underlay the more or less weekly production of the *Lundis*, a certain fatigue, a loss of intellectual vitality. And we already see the seeds of that as early as 1850, within the dynamic of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' itself. The opening moments of the essay seem charged with a real cosmopolitan energy: 'il y a plus d'une demeure dans la maison de mon père' (there is more than one mansion in the house of my father) Sainte-Beuve bravely says at the moment of directing his gaze beyond the shores of Europe.[73] But it is energy that rapidly evaporates; Sainte-Beuve has no intention of dwelling at length in any of the more far-flung literary residences, and a mere few sentences later he turns hurriedly back: 'Cet hommage rendu à ce qu'il suffit d'apercevoir et de reconnaître, nous ne sortirons plus de nos horizons' (Once this homage has been rendered to what one needs only to glimpse and acknowledge, we shall not stray further beyond our own horizons).[74]

In the closing pages of the essay this becomes a veritable retreat, a self-ensconcing in a well-upholstered refuge. Literary travelling is all well and good, but it is also imaginatively tiring, and at the end of the day it is advisable for the cultured European to avoid—in context the analogy seems an instructively symptomatic one—the role of the Wandering Jew:

> Car il faut choisir, et la première condition du goût, après avoir tout compris, est de ne pas voyager sans cesse, mais de s'assoir une fois et de se fixer. Rien ne blase et n'éteint plus le goût que les voyages sans fin; l'esprit poétique n'est pas Juif Errant …
>
> For one must choose, and, after having understood everything, the primary condition of taste is not to be permanently on the move, but rather to sit down and settle. Nothing numbs and extinguishes taste more than endless travel; the poetic spirit is not a Wandering Jew …

Sainte-Beuve tells us, this time down, so to speak, from his equivalent of Mount Sinai.[75] The declared preference now is for the sedentary position ('s'assoir une fois'), from which Sainte-Beuve projects

[73] *CL* iii. 50. [74] *CL* iii. 51.

[75] *CL* iii. 53. This is a reprise of the 1843 article on Homer: 'on est dans un changement à vue perpétuel; on s'use dans des voyages sans fin; l'esprit poétique a été comme le Juif-Errant' (today it is all about perpetually shifting viewpoints, wearing oneself out in endless journeys, the poetic spirit as a sort of Wandering Jew) (*PC* v. 333). In the *Dissertation sur la Joconde*, Boileau took a similar view of the hazards of literary travelling. Pierre Moreau summarizes Boileau's view as 'le classique voyage peu, se félicite de ne pas suivre les folies de l'étranger' (the classical temperament travels little, is happy not to embroil itself in the follies of foreign ventures) (*Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 15). This is a far cry from that earlier phase of cosmopolitan élan where the critic is defined as 'une sorte de Bohémien vagabond et presque de Juif Errant' (a sort of vagabond Bohemian, almost a Wandering Jew) (*Pr.L.* ii. 226) and his métier as 'comme un voyage perpétuel avec toutes sortes de personnes et en toutes sortes de pays, par curiosité' (a sort

Une saison dans la vie où, tous les voyages étant faits, toutes les expériences étant achevées, on n'a pas de plus vives jouissances que d'étudier et d'approfondir les choses qu'on sait, de savourer ce qu'on sent, comme de voir et de revoir les gens qu'on aime: pures délices du cœur et du goût dans la maturité. C'est alors que ce mot *classique* prend son vrai sens, et qu'il se définit pour tout homme de goût par un choix de prédilection et irrésistible.

A season in life when, with all one's travels behind one, all one's experiences completed, one's most intense pleasures derive from studying and fathoming the things one knows, savouring what one feels, like the pleasure of seeing again and again the people one likes: the pure delights of the heart and of mature taste. It is then that the word *classic* assumes its true meaning, defined for a man of taste by the irresistible choice of what one prefers.[76]

Sainte-Beuve's choice—the choice which allegedly captures the 'true' meaning of the classic—involves converting the literary world into a kind of private study furnished with an exceedingly comfortable chair, seated in which the encounter with the 'classic' becomes—the bathos of this scarcely requires comment—time agreeably spent in the company of those old familiars: 'Vieux vin, vieux livres, vieux amis' (Old wine, old books, old friends).[77] Here we enter the metaphorical terminus of the relation linking 'classic' and 'taste'.

This is no idle rhetorical flourish in praise of a form of cultural idleness. It is a profoundly Beuvian fantasy and will resurface regularly as, through the 1850s and 1860s, Sainte-Beuve pursues his further meditations on the question of the classic and its place in the defence (in various senses of the term) of what he understands by 'culture'. At first sight it may look like the subordination of a principled—if limited—selection from the library of the world to more arbitrary considerations of personal taste: 'après avoir tout compris', one can retire to the comforts of 'les choses qu'on sait'.[78] But the question of personal taste is itself subordinated to and guided by an institutional selection of 'traditions' and models of 'taste', at once French and imperial, the legitimating analogue for which is Virgil and Augustan Rome. In this wilful narrowing of horizons, both the classic and the discourse about the classic (the discipline of literary criticism) are to have a 'function', which

of perpetual journey, driven by curiosity, with all manner of people and all manner of countries) (*PL* 259); see also *Mes poisons*: 'En littérature, je suis un grand *reconnaisseur* de terres nouvelles. Je passe en vue, je les signale, quelquefois j'y débarque, rarement je m'y établis' (In the matter of literature, I am a great *reconnoiteur* of new territories. I take in the sights, point them out, sometimes I make a landing but rarely settle there) (p. 11).

[76] *CL* iii. 54.

[77] *CL* iii. 54. See also the article on Gabriel Naudé: 'Aimer les vieux livres, comme goûter le vieux vin, est un signe de maturité déjà' (Loving old books, like tasting old wines, is already a sign of maturity) (*PL* 677).

[78] *CL* iii. 53–4.

is to act—in an image that Sainte-Beuve uses numerous times[79] —as a 'dyke' ('une digue') holding back the tides of modern barbarism and anarchy. The term 'function' is taken from Matthew Arnold and seems to be one of the earliest, if not the first, use of the term in connection with the enterprise of criticism.[80] Although they were to differ on a number of fundamental issues (most notably the respective claims of ancient Greece and Rome on modern understandings of the legacy of the 'classic'[81]), they also corresponded in the tones of unqualified mutual admiration.[82] And, if the term 'function' in 'The Function of Criticism' designated primarily an autonomous critical practice dedicated to seeing 'the object as in itself it really is',[83] in other contexts Arnold's view of the purposes of criticism was clearly tied to a mission of preserving and defending something seen as under threat. His best-known title, *Culture and Anarchy*, could well serve as an alternative title for the governing project of the *Lundis*. That, more or less, is the story of the remainder of this book, its first destination being the resting place that Sainte-Beuve defined as the 'tradition'.

[79] For details, see Ch. 10.

[80] Sainte-Beuve uses the term *fonction* in connection with Théophile Gautier's journalistic criticism: 'Le journal, tel qu'il est constitué de nos jours, a créé une charge, une fonction capitale et des plus actives, laquelle, à son tour, réclame impérieusement son homme: c'est celle de la critique ordinaire et universelle' (The newspaper, as presently constituted, has created a responsibility, a capital function of the most active sort, which, in turn, imperiously demands a certain kind of person: that of the everyday and universal critic) (*NL* vi. 296).

[81] See Ch. 4.

[82] Sainte-Beuve describes Arnold as 'un critique ami, un étranger qui nous connaît mieux que personne' (a critic-friend, a foreigner who knows us better than anyone) (*NL* ix. 250). Arnold refers abundantly to Sainte-Beuve throughout his writings, the principal text being the essay on Sainte-Beuve that Arnold wrote for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1866.

[83] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York, 1965), 238.

# 3

# Classic and Nation

## I

In his magisterial account of the long trajectory of literary canon formation in Europe, Ernst Robert Curtius finally arrives in the nineteenth century, where, inevitably, he confronts the thinking of Sainte-Beuve. He does so in terms of putting his finger on a problem: 'The concept of a world literature could not but shatter the French canon. Sainte-Beuve sensed the dilemma. He did not solve it.'[1] What, then, was the nature of the dilemma that Sainte-Beuve at once sensed yet failed to solve? The view from the mountain staged in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' reaches, however incompletely, for a 'vision of the classic' that was 'not national, but pluralistic and global'.[2] It carries the traces of the cosmopolitan commitments of his earlier involvement with the *Globe* newspaper in which Goethe found some of the inspiration for his ideas of *Weltliteratur*. Yet, as Curtius notes, it is significant that, even within its largely European purview, Sainte-Beuve's 'Temple of Taste' does not include Goethe himself[3] and that we find in his posthumously published notes the remark: 'Je ne me figure pas qu'on dise: *les classiques allemands*' (I cannot imagine saying: *the German classics*).[4] In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', Italy, Spain

[1] The observation continues: 'From his day to Van Tieghem's, France's tie to the Classicism of the seventeenth century has proved to be a tenaciously maintained attitude of opposition to Europeanism. But today it strikes one as a pure ananchronism' (Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 271).

[2] Antoine Compagnon, 'Sainte-Beuve and the Canon', *Modern Language Notes*, 110 (1995), 1193.

[3] Goethe figures as critic rather than as writer, as commentator on, rather than producer of, the classic.

[4] 'Il y a des langues et des littératures ouvertes de toutes parts et non circonscrites auxquelles je ne me figure pas qu'on puisse appliquer le mot *classique*: je ne me figure pas qu'on dise: *les classiques allemands*' ( There are languages and literature open to all-comers and without fixed boundaries, to which I cannot imagine applying the word *classic*: I can't imagine anyone saying: *the German classics*) (*Cahiers de Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1876), 108). The criteria of exclusion ('open' and 'without fixed boundaries') suggest a tension between the idea of the classic and the model of *Weltliteratur*

and England are said to have 'their' classics, and then eventually France,[5] but on Germany the text is silent. There are probably many explanations for this exclusion, but one has almost certainly to do with a constraint on the internationalist perspective—the developing link between the canonical and the national. Indeed it has been suggested that Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* was developed as an ideal to counteract the *lack* (in Germany) of a national–classical canon.[6] It was thus an attempt not so much to escape the restriction of literature to the national as to compensate for its absence. The classics may gather on the internationalized slopes of Mount Parnassus or Montserrat, but, at least in the case of modern literatures, their provenance and affiliation remain bounded by the parameters of nation.[7]

France, of course, suffered from no such lack. If historically France comes late, it spectacularly remedies the delay with the glories of the *grand siècle.* Voltaire seems to have been the first to yoke the idea of the classic to the first-person-plural pronoun ('nos auteurs classiques'[8]). By 'ours' he did not mean the cosmopolitan library of the world or the collective patrimony of literate humanity. 'Ours', in this context, meant French and specifically the literary masterpieces of the seventeenth century. Voltaire's association of classic, nation and *grand siècle* was to gather pace as the eighteenth century unfolded[9] and had become a settled commonplace by the early nineteenth century, encouraged by, amongst other things, the Consulate and Empire reforms of the educational syllabus, starting with the publication in 1802 of the report by the instructively titled *Commission des livres classiques*.[10] The association was not, however, invented *ex nihilo* by Voltaire, but was preceded and prepared by a history beginning with the linguistic and literary nationalism of Du Bellay's *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (to which Sainte-Beuve

[5] 'L'Italie moderne avait ses classiques, et l'Espagne avait tout droit de croire qu'elle aussi possédait les siens, quand la France se cherchait encore' (Modern Italy had its classics and Spain was entitled to believe it had its own, while France was struggling to find its feet) (*CL* iii. 40).

[6] John Pfizer, 'Goethe's "World Literature": Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization', *Comparative Literature*, 52/3 (2000), 215–16.

[7] On the power of nation and nationalism in the constitution of modern literary canons, see Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris, 1999).

[8] Quoted in Pierre Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques* (Paris, 1952), 5. However, Voltaire tended to use the term with this reference more in his private correspondence than in his published works. Jean Hytier points out that in the latter (crucially *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*) he uses the term only rarely in connection with the seventeenth century ('The Classicism of the Classics', *Yale French Studies*, 38 (1967), 5–6).

[9] Hytier also draws our attention, however, to the supplement to the *Encyclopédie* entry for 'Classique', where the seventeenth-century (and a smattering of eighteenth-century) writers are identified as 'classical French writers' (ibid. 6).

[10] See Daniel Milo, 'Les Classiques scolaires', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt. 2, *La Nation* (Paris, 1986), iii. 528–31.

will devote serious attention in several of the *Lundis*[11] and erupting in the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the Quarrel, the nationalists were the 'modernes', anxious to weaken the prestige accorded by the 'anciens' to Greek and Roman antiquity as the enduring benchmark of what is admirable and worthy of emulation.[12] The Moderns thus opened a pathway, running through the eighteenth century, to the second great quarrel of French literary politics: the early nineteenth-century dispute between romantics and classicists,[13] in which the former were, roughly, to the seventeenth-century Moderns what the latter were to the seventeenth-century Ancients.

The parallels are of course far from exact, diverging on the back of an interconnected series of paradoxes. Stendhal's lively polemic *Racine et Shakespeare* captured some of these paradoxes, notoriously provoking the reactionaries by pointing out that what they revered as old was, in its time, new (Racine had been a romantic before becoming a classic), and that, accordingly, every time they opened their mouths to pronounce on the canon, they were undone by the very things in the name of which they claimed to speak. At the same time he ran a similarly teasing argument with regard to the category of the 'national'. *Racine et Shakespeare* enters a plea for a 'tragédie nationale en prose', to be drawn largely from French history of the medieval period. In the general context of the polemic, this demand reflects the romantics' stress on the priority of the local and the particular over the vapid timelessness allegedly vaunted by neoclassical orthodoxy.

[11] Here Sainte-Beuve relates Du Bellay's writings to the development of 'l'idée du classique *français*' (*NL* xiii. 299, emphasis added). This was very different from the earlier uses of Du Bellay in the pro-romantic *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie et du théâtre au XVIe siècle* (1828), where the seventeenth century figures as, in the words of François Rigolot, 'an intermission or a parenthesis' in the story of the emergence of a truly modern national literature. At the same time Du Bellay and the sixteenth century generally are also positioned as a preparatory sketch for the *grand siècle*, a view even more strongly foregrounded in the later *Lundis* (François Rigolot, 'Bridging Literary Generations: Sainte-Beuve's Romantic *Tableau* of the Renaissance', in Alain Toumayan (ed.), *Literary Generations: A Festschrift in Honor of Edward D. Sullivan* (French Forum; Lexington, Ky., 1992), 117–24; 'Pour Sainte-Beuve (1804–1904–2004): Propos d'un seiziémiste', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1 (2004), 3–24). On the relation in the sixteenth century between the idea of the 'classic' and 'la valeur de la tradition nationale', a difficult relation in so far as it had to compete with the more internationalist temper of the Republic of Letters, see Emmanuelle Mortgat, 'La Quête des premiers classiques français et les origines de l'histoire littéraire nationale', in Alain Viala (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? Littératures classiques*, 19 (Paris, 1993), 199.

[12] See Joan DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin-de-siècle* (Chicago, 1977).

[13] In this context, I shift, perhaps confusingly, between using the terms 'classicist' and 'neoclassicist' to designate the conservative party to the nineteenth-century debate. Stendhal uses the term *classiciste*, and also *classicisme*. He appears to have been the first to do so. *Classicisme* does not, however, come into widespread usage until much later (see Ch. 2 n. 36).

But Stendhal taunts his Academician adversary (the partisans of *Bonnes Lettres*) by suggesting that, through its focus on the 'grands hommes de notre moyen âge' (the great men of our medieval period), nothing could be more congenial to conservative opinion. Indeed, the conservatives could not 'sans se contredire eux-mêmes s'opposer à l'apparition d'une tragédie … qui nous entretiendra des grands noms des Montmorency, des la Trimouille, des Crillon, des Lautrec' (without self-contradiction oppose the development of a kind of tragedy … that will dwell upon the great names of French national life, the Montmorencys, the La Tremouilles, the Crillons, and the Lautrecs). For such a development is 'tout à fait dans l'intérêt de la Chambre des pairs' (completely in the interests of the Chamber of Peers), while, were it not for the hostility to prose 'en leur qualité de fabricants de vers à l'usage de l'hôtel de Rambouillet' (in their capacity as versemakers in the manner of the Hotel de Rambouillet), the Academicians and assorted cohorts could not fail to see that 'la tragédie nationale est un trésor pour les Bonnes Lettres' (tragedy on national themes is a great boon to Fine Writing).[14]

Stendhal mischievously captured something in the nineteenth-century *querelle* beyond the surface antagonism of the universal and the particular, the absolute and the relative—namely, that both sides to the dispute had, from very different vantage points, a common stake in appropriating the 'national'. For what was the neoclassical fetishizing of the seventeenth century other than a defence of a specifically national 'tradition', even when—as in the case of Nisard—they claimed to abjure the national in the name of the eternal? Had he been in even more mischievous mood, Stendhal might also have seized on a further paradox. For the nineteenth-century conservatives, the national 'classics' of the seventeenth century constituted France's version of antiquity. As models for emulation, they were structurally and ideologically homologous with the value that the works of classical antiquity had for the Ancients in the seventeenth-century *querelle*, whereas the strictly nationalist agenda had belonged to the Moderns such as Perrault, for whom 'French' and 'now' had far greater meaning than 'Greek/Roman' and 'then'. The Moderns praised as exemplars of a national cultural modernity several of the seventeenth-century writers, thus laying a trap for the likes of Boileau by welcoming contemporary authors into the Pantheon of French writing on terms designed to break the link with the past prized by the Ancients. Over a century later, however, the very same writers whom the seventeenth-century Moderns had hailed as the embodiment of the contemporary were celebrated by the nineteenth-century academic classicists precisely in order to reject the pressure of the contemporary.

[14] Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare* (Paris, 1970), 126–7.

The paradox was a historical rather than a logical one, an effect of the passage of time whereby what was now a past had once been a present.[15] History seemed therefore to have delivered a small lesson in the cunning of reason, generating outcomes whereby the tables were turned on prior positions within their own terms. The history—precisely because it was a *history*—left the way strewn with aporias, inside which the national, through its shifting affiliations with old and new, classic and modern, had become disputed property. Sainte-Beuve, while he (inexcusably) gave Stendhal's novels short shrift, was much taken with the boldly irreverent spirit of his criticism.[16] His partiality for *Racine et Shakespeare* stemmed to some extent from his own grip, expressed less aggressively but certainly not without a hint of malice, on the same or related paradoxes. Interestingly, he touched lightly on one of the more important of these in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?':

> Il se vit alors une contradiction singulière et piquante: les hommes les plus épris des merveilles de ce siècle de *Louis le Grand* et qui allaient jusqu'à sacrifier tous les anciens aux modernes, ces hommes dont Perrault était le chef, tendaient à exalter et à consacrer ceux-là mêmes qu'ils rencontraient pour contradicteurs les plus ardents et pour adversaires. Boileau vengeait et soutenait avec colère les anciens contre Perrault qui préconisait les modernes, c'est-à-dire Corneille, Molière, Pascal, et les hommes éminents de son siècle, y compris Boileau l'un des premiers. Le bon La Fontaine, en prenant parti dans la querelle pour le docte Huet, ne s'apercevait pas que lui-même, malgré ses oublis, était à la veille de se réveiller classique lui-même.
>
> At this juncture a strange and piquant contradiction became apparent: those individuals most taken with the marvels of the age of Louis XIV and who went so far as to sacrifice all the Ancients to the Moderns, these individuals whose leader was Perrault, tended to exalt and consecrate the very people whom they encountered as their most ardent opponents and adversaries, that is to say, Corneille, Molière, Pascal, and the eminent men of his own time, including Boileau among the first. Good old La Fontaine, in taking sides, in the quarrel, with the learned Huet, did not see that he himself, despite what he overlooked, was on the eve of waking up as a classic in his own right.[17]

This shrewd identification both of and with the trap laid by Perrault for Boileau not only reveals Sainte-Beuve's awareness of the shifting sands beneath the apparent fixity of adversarial positions; more importantly, it takes us to the ground on which he himself stood in respect of the idea of the national classic. Sainte-Beuve returned many times to the *querelle* as more than just a historical phenomenon. What he found in the play of its arguments and passions bore directly on his understanding of his own age and the place in it

[15] Compagnon characterizes it as a 'strange twist, chasm, irony' ('Sainte-Beuve and the Canon', 1192).

[16] *CL* ix. 302–31. [17] *CL* iii. 40–1.

of what he called the 'tradition'. In his review of Hippolyte Rigault's *Histoire de la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Sainte-Beuve maintains that quarrels of this type are perennial features of the structure and dynamic of sophisticated literary cultures,[18] and the necessary conditions of their occurrence include 'une Antiquité bien connue' (a well-known Antiquity) and 'une époque moderne, bien émancipée, bien brillante et florissante, un grand siècle déjà' (a modern epoch, thoroughly emancipated, brilliant and flourishing, already a great century).[19] In the French case, the 'grand siècle' was of course the seventeenth century and its quarrel the paradigm for all the others to come ('C'est au dix-septième siècle qu'il prend sa forme complète et qu'il se définit tout à fait, qu'il se limite en se développant, et va prêter désormais à des guerres régulières, à des batailles rangées' (It is in the seventeenth century that it acquires its completed form and exact definition, limiting itself even as it develops, and opening henceforth onto regular wars, onto orderly battles)).[20] The critical property of a great century was that it be 'modern' in the sense of 'emancipated' from the tyranny of the past, in which therefore the feeling for antiquity (even on the part of its warmest partisans) was unthinkable without a distance at once temporal and cultural, a difference that was, precisely, the difference of modernity. In other words, even the Boileau camp depended for its very existence on the historical reality celebrated by the Perrault camp.

At first sight, it is Perrault's argument that seems to command Sainte-Beuve's loyalty: 'Il exprimait pourtant une idée très-philosophique, c'est qu'il n'y a pas de raison pour que la nature ne crée pas aujourd'hui d'aussi grands hommes qu'autrefois, et qu'il y a place, dans sa fertilité inépuisable, à un éternel renouvellement des talents' (He nevertheless expressed a very philosophical idea, to wit, that there is no reason why nature should not create today men just as great as yesterday, and that, in her inexhaustible fertility, there is room for an eternal renewal of talents);[21] against the 'pédants en *us*' (the habitual pedants), Perrault wins hands down ('Perrault, ce me semble, a d'emblée gain de cause' (Perrault, it seems to me, wins outright)).[22] By contrast, Boileau can be both timid and rigid, especially in his indifference to

[18] In 'Les Abeilles et les araignées' (in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq (Paris, 2001)), Marc Fumaroli takes us back to the sixteenth century and to Italy. Curtius refers us all the way back to the twelfth century: 'But let me turn back to the "Moderns" of 1170. About fifty years earlier the "Ancients" had been described as giants and the "Moderns" as dwarfs who could enjoy a wider perspective merely because they stood on the shoulders of those giants. But towards the close of the century we find the full-fledged Moderns boasting that they are the equals of their elders. They even profess a certain fastidiousness concerning the style of the classics. They feel that they can do things better' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 591).

[19] *CL* xiii. 434. [20] *CL* xiii. 434. [21] *CL* v. 266. [22] *CL* v. 268.

the cognitive and material gains of the scientific revolution. This would seem tantamount to handing the victory laurels to Perrault. But, if Sainte-Beuve appears to side with Perrault, it is an allegiance formed entirely within the paradox underlined in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', whereby, although their respective terms of evaluation differed fundamentally, Boileau was closer to Perrault in defending modern literature than perhaps Boileau himself and certainly many of his contemporary and succeeding camp followers liked to think. Perrault was largely right to imply that the dispute between Boileau and himself was to some extent based on a false polarity. The generic term 'anciens' was in fact something of an obfuscation, masking a division into two armies fighting quite different culture wars. The true reactionaries—on a spectrum from the inane Gâcon ('un chétif et déshonorant défenseur des Anciens' (a puny and dishonourable defender of the Ancients)[23]) to the more amiable Huet[24]—believed in antiquity alone, seeing no role for a modern literature other than servile imitation (albeit often on the basis of anachronistic back projection into antiquity of the codes and vocabularies of seventeenth-century polite culture). Boileau was not like this at all, and understanding his true place and meaning in the Quarrel requires disentangling him from all manner of misappropriations: 'Il m'a toujours semblé que ceux alors qui étaient les plus ardents à invoquer l'autorité de Boileau, n'étaient pas ceux qu'il aurait le plus sûrement reconnus pour siens … Boileau était plus hardi et neuf que ne le pensaient, même les Andrieux' (It has always seemed to me that those most keen to invoke the authority of Boileau were not those who would have recognized him surely as one of their own … Boileau was bolder and more original than even the Andrieux of this world thought).[25] In his own way, Boileau was something of a modernist, committed to seeking out and encouraging the 'excellent' in contemporary writing, although differing fundamentally from Perrault in insisting that the appropriate guide remained the example of the ancients; Boileau's project was to promote the best that could be thought and written (in France) on the model, though not in slavish imitation, of the best that had been thought and written (in antiquity): 'L'œuvre de Boileau, ce fut, non pas de revenir à Malherbe déjà bien lointain, mais de faire subir à la poésie française une réforme du même genre que celle que Pascal

[23] *CL* xiii. 157.

[24] 'Huet est de ceux qui entretiennent et conservent, non pas de ceux qui transmettent, en courant, le flambeau' (Huet belongs with those who maintain and preserve, not with those who, fleet of foot, pass on the torch) (*CL* ii. 50). This, however, is to simplify Huet's position, whose *Traité de l'origine des romans* was published in 1670 as the preface to Mme de Lafayette's *Zayde*. That must count for something by way of involvement in contemporary writing. I am grateful to Peter Bayley for drawing my attention to this source.

[25] *CL* vi. 512.

avait faite dans la prose' (The aim of Boileau's work was not to return to Malherbe, by now already belonging to a distant past, but to subject French poetry to a reform of the same type that Pascal had effected with prose).[26]

For Sainte-Beuve therefore, Perrault and Boileau were like ships passing in the night while sailing to some extent in common waters;[27] the question of 'taking sides' was simply a straw man erected in the fury of polemic and consolidated by empty prejudice. This did not, however, mean resolving all the issues of the *querelle* wholly on Perrault's terms. There remained an important difference. If Boileau sometimes erred in the direction of the 'rigid', Perrault's besetting sin was to have been excessively cavalier (*dégagé* is Sainte-Beuve's term) with regard to the legacy of the past. The Achilles heel of Perrault's position was his uncritical acceptance of a progress narrative of intellectual and literary history. This was even more pronounced in some of Perrault's more militant disciples—for example, the abbé de Pons, to whom Sainte-Beuve devotes a substantial section of his review. Pons figures in Rigault's account as something of a grotesque; Sainte-Beuve, less offensively but no less condescendingly, refers to him as 'un tout petit personnage secondaire', a bit player, a 'statuette' rather than a 'statue'.[28] By the nineteenth century

[26] *CL* vi. 500. One of Boileau's ambitions was to encourage the emergence of a national classic in France. According to D'Olivet's *Histoire de l'Académie*, at one of its meetings Boileau stated: 'Je voudrais que la France pût avoir ces auteurs *classiques* aussi bien que l'Italie' (I would wish France to have its *classic* authors as well as Italy) (quoted in Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 2). More generally, Frank Kermode claims that 'French classicism in the great century was not, as Curtius remarks, an artificial imitation of antique models, but an expression of the national mind' (*The Classic* (London, 1975), 68). Michael Moriarty has also linked seventeenth-century French 'classicism' with the 'national' or what he calls a 'national classicism' (*Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1988), 20). There is here a further irony or turning of the tables, whereby, if Boileau can be seen as a champion of the modern, Perrault, with hindsight, can seem reactionary, most notably in connection with the famous performance of the opera-tragedy *Alceste* that played such a prominent public role in the attempt of the Moderns to secure the favours of Louis XIV. In his dialogue *La Critique de l'opéra, un examen de la tragédie intitulée Alceste*, Perrault compares and contrasts Euripides' play with Quinault's libretto, all to the advantage of the latter. The justification of Quinault's superiority rested entirely on what, in the name of propriety, Quinault had suppressed in Euripides' version. As Fumaroli notes, this is exactly the kind of argument that nineteenth-century neoclassical orthodoxy would use in criticizing Shakespeare and romantic drama ('Les Abeilles et les araignées', 167). In defending the cause of the Moderns, Perrault thus made himself into what Stendhal was to describe as an Ancient in the most retrograde sense of the term.

[27] In the early article on Boileau, Sainte-Beuve puts Boileau and Perrault together, along with other seventeenth-century figures, as sharing common ground while comprehensively misunderstanding one another: 'bien qu'ils eussent entre eux des traits généraux de ressemblance, [ils] ne s'entendaient nullement et ne sympathisaient pas' (although there were between them certain general resemblances, [they] did not understand one another at all and felt no sympathy for each other) (*PL* 10).

[28] *CL* xiii. 141–2.

he would have been seen, if at all, as a tiny ripple on the surface of the Quarrel, at best a kind of antiquarian footnote to the relevant history. Why then go to such trouble to rescue him from near total oblivion? Is it merely a reflection of Sainte-Beuve's incorrigible taste for the obscurer recesses of literary history, rationalized as dispensation of 'literary justice' to the forgotten and the neglected?[29]

In fact the archival recovery of this scholarly curiosity turns out to have a serious point; it is not just a minor adjustment to the scales of justice, but a way of making a statement about the nature of literary history and in particular the relation between tradition and modernity. Just as there were (at least) two factions in the party of the Ancients, so also the Moderns were subdivided into those whose essential commitment was to the present or the 'now'[30] (Perrault, for example, claimed in the *Parallèle* that the 'siècle de Louis XVI' was the pinnacle of 'perfection', after which all was decay and decline[31]), and those whose belief in the progress story carried a projection into the future. The former were strictly speaking the Moderns, whereas the latter are better described as Avantgardists.[32] The term is Sainte-Beuve's ('Nous le voyons nous-mêmes, le zèle d'avant-garde, l'ardeur de l'escarmouche a emporté l'abbé de Pons' (We ourselves can see how the abbé du Pons was swept along by avant-gardist zeal, a passionate taste for the skirmish)).[33] Pons's main argumentative weapon was an analogy between the unquestionable advances in science and philosophy (the so-called Cartesian revolution) and a corresponding model of literary change: 'Il prétendait que, dans ces matières de poésie et de belles-lettres, le monde fût affranchi des jugements d'autorité et même de tradition, exactement comme il l'était en matière de philosophie depuis Descartes' (He claimed that, on these issues of poetry and belles-lettres, the world had been liberated from authoritative judgements and even from tradition, exactly as it had been in the subject of philosophy since Descartes).[34]

[29] For an extended discussion of what Sainte-Beuve understood by literary 'justice', see Wolf Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 434–50.

[30] See the line of the young Angélique in Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*: 'Les anciens sont les anciens, et nous sommes les gens de maintenant' ( The ancients are the ancients, and we are the people of the present) (*Œuvres complètes*, xi (Paris, 1971), 1141).

[31] On the problems this posed for Perrault's thinking as a Modernist, see DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns*, 16–17.

[32] On this distinction, see Antoine Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité* (Paris, 1990).

[33] *CL* xiii. 152. Sainte-Beuve also entertained the contrastive idea of a 'classique d'arrière-garde', his example of the latter being Latin poetry in the age of Louis XIV (*CL* xii. 22).

[34] *CL* xiii. 153. According to Sainte-Beuve, Perrault's thinking was also future-oriented ('tourné vers l'avenir'), but largely in terms of the development of the natural sciences (*CL* v. 255).

For Sainte-Beuve this transfer of the language of historical 'emancipation' to the literary domain was, quite simply, a category confusion.[35] Change is both inevitable and essential since, without it, a literary culture withers and dies, but change was not to be equated with progress and, even less so, with an abandonment of the past. The otherwise pointless sparring with the long-forgotten abbé de Pons acquires its *raison d'être* in this distinction, and brings us back to the much larger context of the Boileau/Perrault dispute. The intellectual relation between their two respective positions was asymmetric. Boileau's polemical instincts blinded him to a real (if limited) affinity with Perrault; they generated a misperception. The same did not hold for Perrault. It was not that Perrault misperceived an aspect of his own position, but that he altogether failed—or refused—to incorporate it. Boileau's devotion to honing the idioms of contemporary writing implicitly conceded much of what Perrault stood for, but Perrault did not reciprocate on the question of the legacy, his enthusiasm for the teleological progress-narrative blinding him, in a far more radical way, to a proper appreciation of the value of the past. Sainte-Beuve's assessment of the *querelle* thus produces a major reversal. If he starts in the company of Perrault, he ends in the company of Boileau, and it is there that he stays. This explains in part—though, as we shall see, only in part—why he felt able to say of Boileau what he could never have said of Perrault: 'S'il m'est permis de parler pour moi-même, Boileau est un des hommes qui m'ont le plus occupé depuis que je fais de la critique, et avec qui j'ai le plus vécu en idée' (If I may speak personally, Boileau has been one of those to have preoccupied me the most since I became a critic, and with whose ideas I have lived most intimately).[36]

It is this subtle distillation of Perrault and Boileau that Sainte-Beuve injects into 'la querelle classique et romantique'.[37] It was meant to act as a tonic revivifying a sterile debate, but was disabled from the outset by the effects on the new quarrel of the various paradoxes created by the latter's temporal distance from its predecessor. One symptom of these changes was a new semantic division within the term 'classique', generally—but by no means uniformly—related to whether the term was used as noun or adjective (what

[35] Although Sainte-Beuve does not mention him, in the *querelle* this was the case made by the baron de Longepierre in his *Discours sur les anciens*, where the argument assigns progress to the sciences, but rejects the progress story in connection with literature (quoted in Fumaroli, 'Les Abeilles et les araignées', 182–3). On the other hand, Sainte-Beuve can also toy with the notion of literary 'progress'. In the articles on Du Bellay he uses the word *progrès* twice, the second in the concluding peroration: Du Bellay was one of those 'qui ont servi dans une noble mesure le progrès de la pensée et de l'art' (who, in noble measure, served the cause of progress in thought and art) (*NL* xiii. 275, 355).

[36] *CL* vi. 495. [37] *CL* iii. 495.

in English is often discriminated as 'classic' and 'classical'). *Classique* as the 'classic' was the generic term for a great literary work (the sense that is dominant in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'), while *classique* as 'classical' was more a typological–historical term with which to designate a certain kind of writing produced under a particular set of historical conditions. But, because the form of the French word remains the same in both applications, the distinction was often blurred, especially by those who, in the heat of polemic, had a vested interest in proclaiming France's classical literature of the seventeenth century its only great literature.[38]

In the early nineteenth century this conflation of the generic and the typological, the evaluative and the historical, was for the most part academically generated, including the participation of the Académie française, whose definition of *classique* in the 1835 dictionary Sainte-Beuve rejected in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'.[39] There were to be many comparable gestures of dissociation, most notably around the figure of André Chénier (for Sainte-Beuve often a pretext, or a kind of shorthand, for registering his disagreements with the more antediluvian neoclassicists). Latouche's edition of Chénier was praised for its wresting of Chénier from 'le monde des purs classiques' (the world of pure classicists), where *pur* is understood as the anaemic issue of 'des mains académiques' (Academic hands).[40] Chénier reappears as a term of comparative reference in Sainte-Beuve's remarks on the painter Léopold Robert: those

> critiques purement classiques … ceux qui n'ont cessé de rester fidèles dans leurs recommendations à tous les procédés et à toutes les routines d'académie et d'atelier, ne sauraient le revendiquer comme un des leurs: il le faut ranger parmi les classiques d'un ordre à part, et parmi les André Chénier de la peinture.
>
> Those purely classical critics … those who, in their recommendations, have not ceased to remain faithful to all the procedures and routines of academy and workshop cannot claim him as one of their own: he must be placed in a separate order of the classical, with the André Chéniers of painting.[41]

In his review of Banville, Sainte-Beuve wrestles with the meaning of the term *romantique*, settling at the most general level for those who seek 'de renouveler l'Art et de l'affranchir de certaines règles convenues' (to renew art and free it from certain agreed rules). On this criterion, while it may be 'une sorte

[38] Similar confusions can also arise with English 'classic' and 'classical'. In *Essays in Criticism*, Matthew Arnold uses 'classic' (as noun) to describe the great work ('the class of the very best'), but in the same sentence the term, as adjective, slides appositionally and thus confusingly into being synonymous with 'classical' ('for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical') (quoted in Henri Peyre, *Qu'est-ce que le classicisme?* (Paris, 1971), 26).

[39] 'ce sont les professeurs de 1830 à 1850 qui ont imposé en France l'admiration des classiques' (it was the teachers from 1830 to 1850 who imposed in France admiration of the classics) (Peyre, *Qu'est-ce que le classicisme?*, 29).

d'abus' to classify Chénier as a 'romantic', it acquires a certain legitimacy when mobilized to rescue Chénier from the clutches of 'les soi-disant classiques modernes' (the so-called modern classicists),[42] those whom elsewhere Sainte-Beuve denounced as embracing the wrong, because 'intolerant', image of both the 'classic' and the 'national' (what in his article on Marceline Desbordes-Valmore he called 'l'intolérance nationale et classique' (national and classical intolerance)).[43]

Amongst other things, this meant engaging with the perhaps most singularly intolerant of 'les soi-disant classiques modernes', Désiré Nisard, that pygmy version of his intellectual master, Boileau. Here for example is Nisard pronouncing on Ronsard: 'Boileau a prononcé. Il ne reste plus qu'à donner les motifs de ce jugement' (Boileau has spoken. All that is left is to give reasons in support of this judgement).[44] The history of taste thus ends with Boileau, in the self-evidence of a definitive judgement that allows only for its repeated citation and justification. But accompanying this abject surrender of autonomy, and corresponding freezing of history, there was also a form of pure mania. Nisard represented himself as an anti-nationalist (he spoke of 'la chimère d'une littérature exclusivement nationale' (the chimera of a purely national literature)[45]), but only by mounting the eccentric argument that posited a priori the 'French spirit' as an eternal essence that contingently happened to be embodied in the France of the seventeenth century, the territorial and historical site of the fusion of the two major strands of the human spirit at its most highly developed.[46] In this way Nisard displayed his contempt for the mere particular (of which, in romantic ideology, the national was a manifestation), in just the same way as he could rubbish the multi-coloured particularism of the cosmopolitan outlook as a dilution and dissipation of spiritual strength (what he called 'discipline'). What mattered to Nisard was the Universal, the particular being of importance only in so far as the universal required a locus, a home. This made for a very particular way with the category of the Particular: only France qualified. Stripped of its pseudo-Hegelian overlay (which Nisard would not have recognized had he been brought face to face with it), this boiled down in practice to the formula French is best, a notion for which in itself Nisard was not of course personally responsible, since it had held sway over the European literary imagination until challenged by the insurgent nationalisms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But, in Nisard's hands, it mutated into a grotesquely belated manifestation of *folie de grandeur*.

[40] *CL* iii. 481–3. [41] *CL* x. 438. [42] *CL* xiv. 71. [43] *NL* xii. 151.
[44] Désiré Nisard, *Histoire de la littérature française* (Paris, 1861), i. 343. [45] Ibid. i. 197.
[46] See Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston, 1940), 88–90.

In his private *Notes et pensées*, Sainte-Beuve felicitously characterized this position as 'une espèce de *chauvinisme transcendental*' (a form of *transcendental chauvinism*), adding for good measure that Nisard's endless exaltation of 'l'esprit français ne fait autre chose que de célébrer en tout et partout ses propres qualités' (the French mind does nothing other than celebrate, in everything and everywhere, its own qualities).[47] In public he could not permit himself this kind of abrasiveness. In his 1861 review of Nisard's *Histoire de la littérature française*, the category of *esprit français* is given a more neutral setting as that which is manifested by 'les maîtres les plus admirés … les classiques les plus en honneur et en crédit' (the most admired masters … the most honoured and accredited of the classics).[48] But it is not long before Sainte-Beuve tightens the screw: admiring the classics of the seventeenth century is one thing, but associating them with the term *esprit* is to infect the 'tradition' they exemplify with a form of metaphysical essentialism ('ne serait-ce pas assez de dire les choses du goût?' (would it not suffice to say things of good taste?)[49]). In other words, Nisard, as inheritor of the mantle of neoclassical doctrine, represents in principle an entirely legitimate point of view, but in practice his defence of the tradition is, by virtue of its dogmatic rigidity, paradoxically something of an anomalous innovation: 'M. Nisard, qui représente ostensiblement parmi nos principaux critiques en renom la doctrine classique, n'est pas un classique comme un autre et ne défend pas la tradition comme on la défend communément et comme on le faisait avant lui' (M. Nisard, who, amongst our best-known critics, ostensibly represents the classical doctrine, is not classical like any other and does not defend the tradition as it is commonly defended and was defended before him).[50]

The paradox comes with a barely disguised sting in the tail. Nisard's critical history is distinctively original in giving a new turn to old commonplaces simply by virtue of an unusually aggressive language of discrimination. In his hands, criticism becomes 'judicial' in the sense of a 'trial' ('un procès continuel'), inflicting a punishment ('un châtiment du mal') on those literary malefactors who have failed to measure up to or have deserted the high plain of 'l'esprit français'.[51] This was not how the tradition was traditionally understood, and, under this description, Sainte-Beuve had no reason to resile from his much earlier judgement of Nisard (published in 1833), in which Nisard's version of the tradition ('votre stricte tradition'[52]) is denounced as

[47] *CL* xi. 465 (emphasis in original).
[48] *CL* xv. 209. [49] *CL* xv. 212. [50] *CL* xv. 214.
[51] *CL* xv. 211. This set of images was to be replayed a century later in the notorious Barthes/Picard dispute (see Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris, 1966), 10–11).
[52] *PC* iii. 357.

'une tradition factice' (a factitious tradition). Here tradition and innovation are figured as 'les deux pieds de l'humanité' (the two legs of humanity), one lame-footed ('le pied boîteux'), the other of bold step ('le pied aventureux').[53] Nisard's formulations amounted to an amputation of the latter.

This was about as firm a repudiation of Nisard's violent disfiguring of the terms *classique* and *tradition* as Sainte-Beuve could manage. He was equally firm with that other grandee of the neoclassical persuasion, Saint-Marc Girardin, endorsing the latter's strictures on the contaminating self-indulgence of the romantic *mal du siècle* while keeping his distance from Girardin's proposed cure of sensible being and acting in the 'real' world; this, according to Sainte-Beuve, was to confuse the stern and 'simple' virtues of the classical tradition with those of nineteenth-century bourgeois civilization and thus to substitute one malady for another, the 'positivity' of July Monarchy careerism.[54] But these were bull's-eyes difficult to miss, and even here Sainte-Beuve was reluctant to go for the kill. This was partly a matter of collegial politeness, but also partly because the alternative for Sainte-Beuve was the increasingly bleak prospect of a usurping 'anarchy' inflicting irreparable damage on valued norms of taste and style. Faced with these threats, a return to the *grand siècle* ('l'établissement classique proprement dit' (the classical establishment properly speaking)) and the idea of the national canon had become imperative. This, however, confronted him with the dilemma to which Curtius refers. The nineteenth-century classicists wanted to colonize the national under the aegis of a 'tradition' of which they would be the zealous custodians, while the romantics wanted to annex it to the project of rejuvenating the national literature in terms compatible with contact and exchange on an international scale (especially in the form of cross-border sojourns in the literatures of England and Germany). Sainte-Beuve rejects Nisard's hostility to literary internationalism as a chauvinist prejudice. On the other hand, international travels carried a risk of dilution, even a 'shattering' of the integrity of the canon. In straitjacketing the terms *classique* and *tradition*, Nisard had cast a necessary correction in the image of a punitive correctional, but in principle his purpose was a valid one. Nisard's qualities as critic and scholar included 'instruction, dignité, conscience, honnêteté' (learning, dignity, conscientiousness, honesty) and, if his perspective was excessively narrow, it also embodied, in its own desperate way, a potential mode of renewal: 'Défenseur d'une cause ancienne … il l'a singulièrement rajeunie par le tour et l'esprit de sa défense même; il l'a transformée' (Defender of an old

[53] *PC* iii. 346. [54] *CL* i. 18–19.
[55] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 29
[56] *PC* iii. 337.

cause … he has singularly rejuvenated it with the skill and intelligence of his very defence; he has transformed it).

## II

Nisard's dogmatics had hardened the arteries of the critical argument, but, according to Sainte-Beuve, he had at least shown that there was an urgent need for a 'defense' of the idea of tradition, itself of course a historical invention of the seventeenth century, the very century that later came to be identified in France as *the* Tradition. At best Nisard's work provided an occasion and a stimulus for a suppler flexing of the argument, and it was to this brief that Sainte-Beuve turned in 1858 with 'De la tradition en littérature'. He did so, ironically, at Nisard's invitation, the published text of 'De la tradition' being the first of a series of lectures Sainte-Beuve gave to the students at the École Normale Supérieure, of which Nisard was now director. Perhaps by then Nisard had forgotten or forgiven the sharp edge of the 1836 review, and the later 1861 piece was of course yet to appear. But Nisard may also have noted that, however much Sainte-Beuve may have aspired to getting the blood flowing once again through the sclerotic body of neoclassical doctrine, in the course of the 1850s his own uses of the term *classique* (as an adjective) to denote a classical moment in a national literary history had become commonplace: the possessive adjective in the reference to 'la naissance de notre littérature classique' (the birth of our classical literature) (from the article on Malherbe[55]), the appositional synonymy of 'les grands siècles, les siècles classiques' (the great ages, the classical ages) (from the article 'Villemain et Cousin'[56]), the description of Grimm as 'classique en ce sens qu'il croit en un seul grand siècle dans une nation. … En France il salue donc comme incomparable le siècle de L XIV' (classical in the sense that he believes in a single great age in the life of a nation. … In France he salutes as incomparable the age of Louis XIV)[57] — these, amongst many others, are so many signs of the more specialized usages of the term *classique* inherited from the nineteenth-century *querelle*.

It is by and large these meanings that underlie the argumentative structure of 'De la tradition'. In some respects, the latter can be read as a companion piece to 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', as at once an extension (of certain themes mentioned but undeveloped in the earlier text) and a revision, or rather a contraction, of its terms, specifically those of its global template. What now speaks louder is the call to a more inwards turn, towards the indigenous

[57] *CL* xv. 214.
[58] Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1992), 227–8.
[59] *CL* viii. 67. [60] *CL* vi. 157. [61] *CL* vii. 320.

culture of 'nos classiques'.[58] The tone has also changed. The exploratory hypotaxis of the 'enlarged' definition placed at the centre of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' gives way, in the specification of Sainte-Beuve's self-imposed brief, to a paratactic authoritativeness verging on the peremptory:

> Il y a une tradition—
> En quel sens il la faut entendre—
> En quel sens il la faut maintenir—
>
> There is a tradition—
> In what sense it is to be understood—
> In what sense it is to be maintained—[59]

The tone is partly explained by the situation of address, which Sainte-Beuve not merely notes but makes into a constitutive feature of his argument. In both the original lecture and a footnote later appended for publication, he emphasizes its pedagogical origins in order to mark a division of cultural labour—namely, the distinction between the respective functions of the critic and the professor ('le critique s'inquiétant avant tout … de chercher le nouveau et de découvrir le talent, le professeur de maintenir la tradition et de préserver le goût' (the critic concerned above all … with seeking out the new and discovering talent, the professor with maintaining tradition and preserving taste)[60]). Maintaining the tradition and preserving the canon of taste is the special task of the professoriate, to be handed down through the self-reproducing mechanism of the educational institution to its students: 'Vous êtes de ceux-là mêmes qui, dès demain, aurez pour office et ministère spécial de veiller à la tradition, à la transmission des belles-lettres classiques et humaines' (You are amongst those who, as of tomorrow, will have the special task and office of watching over the tradition, the transmission of classical and humane belles-lettres).[61] It is in relation to these 'functions' (the term is

[62] *CL* xv. 380. See Compagnon: 'the universe is no longer his horizon … soil, homeland and national tradition now prevail over Sainte-Beuve's romantic liberalism and cosmopolitanism' ('Sainte-Beuve and the Canon', 1196–8).

[63] *CL* xv. 357.

[64] *CL* xv. 356. See also the article 'L'Académie française': 'L'Université est proprement la gardienne de la tradition' ( The University is properly the guardian of the tradition) (*NL* xii. 434) and the remark in the Chateaubriand book: 'L'Université moderne, à sa naissance, a été toute réparatrice d'esprit … Tout ce côté réparateur, et par où on s'applique à replanter plutôt que de bâtir (ce qui vaut mieux en matière d'institutions), nous est très-sensible dans l'œuvre universitaire par l'influence de M. de Mussy à l'origine' (At its inception, the spirit of the modern University was entirely reparative … This whole reparative aspect, by virtue of which one's efforts were directed to replanting rather than building (in the matter of institutions, the better option), is, at its point of origin, especially visible in the university endeavour through the influence of M. de Mussy) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 354).

[65] *CL* xv. 357. Sainte-Beuve had already expressed a similar idea in the 'discours d'ouverture' to *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*: 'La tradition a mille fils et mille nœuds dont l'ensemble

Sainte-Beuve's: 'je me vois chargé … de vous préparer à ces dignes et sérieuses fonctions' (I see myself as charged … with preparing you for these worthy and serious functions)[62]) that Sainte-Beuve assumes the mantle and the voice of the Professor. But if this carefully delimits the context of his address, the mission remains a vital one, and in any case the separation of the fields of critic and professor is everywhere overrun; Sainte-Beuve may claim formally to speak as professor, but this in no way means that his substantive concerns as a critic are thereby suspended or eclipsed.

In this perspective, the focus is less on the classic as a series of works randomly distributed across the times and spaces of the world library, but rather on a *culture* of the classic or, more exactly, a classical culture, a historically circumscribed national formation—a period or what in the older vocabularies was called an 'age'—made of beliefs, customs, and habits of thought, along with their material and institutional supports:

> Cette tradition, elle ne consiste pas seulement dans l'ensemble des œuvres dignes de mémoire que nous rassemblons dans nos bibliothèques et que nous étudions: elle a passé en bonne partie dans nos lois, dans nos institutions, dans nos mœurs, dans notre éducation héréditaire et insensible, dans notre habitude et dans toutes nos origines; elle consiste en un certain principe de raison et de culture qui a pénétré à la longue, pour le modifier, dans le caractère même de cette nation gauloise, et qui est entré dès longtemps jusque dans la trempe des esprits.
>
> This tradition does not consist solely in the collection of memorable works that we assemble in our libraries and study: it has in large measure passed into our laws, our institutions, our customs, our hereditary and unconscious education, our habits and all of our origins; it consists of a certain principle of reason and culture which over the long haul has penetrated, while modifying, the very character of this Gaulish nation, and which has long since entered the very fibre of our minds.[63]

Various names can be given to this formation (community, ethos, *mentalité*, 'whole way of life', etc.). Sainte-Beuve's name is 'tradition'. In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', although the issue is peripheral to the essay's main brief, the relation between classic and tradition is adumbrated as follows: 'L'idée de *classique* implique en soi quelque chose qui a suite et consistance, qui fait ensemble et tradition, qui se compose, se transmet et qui dure' (The idea of the *classic* implies in itself something of consequence and consistency, which makes for

faisait sa force: ces lignes du passé sont en train de se briser chaque jour; nous essayerons d'en renouer au moins quelques-uns. Nous vivons à une époque peu propice à la durée des choses délicates: et quoi de plus délicat que la transmission littéraire?' (The tradition has a thousand threads and a thousand knots, whose strength derives from the whole: this skein of the past is in the process of unravelling day by day; we will attempt to re-tie at least some of it. We live at a time that is not that favourable to the lasting quality of delicate things: and what could be more delicate than literary transmission?) (i. 24).

[66] *CL* xv. 357. [67] *CL* xv. 358.

coherence and tradition, which forms itself, transmits itself, and endures).[64] Its defining properties include solidity, consistency, unity, durability, and transmissibility,[65] within the unifying framework of the 'nation'.[66] To these is added a further attribute, which will play an even larger role in 'De la tradition': 'health'. The classical as the healthy (and the romantic as the 'sick') was a distinction Sainte-Beuve took from Goethe, reproducing his well-known formula: 'J'appelle le classique le *sain*, et le romantique le *malade*' (I call the classical *healthy* and the romantic the *sick*).[67] Goethe reappears in 'De la tradition', once more in his guise as critic ('l'exemple du plus grand des critiques' (the exemplary instance of the greatest of critics)). Goethe is the greatest because of the openness and capaciousness of his mind, soaring over the peaks and slopes of Montserrat and absorbing all ('celui de qui l'on peut dire qu'il n'est pas seulement la tradition, mais qu'il est toutes les traditions réunies' (he of whom one can say that he is not merely the tradition, but that he is all traditions gathered together)). However, this catholic image of Goethe is no sooner invoked than heavily edited. The Goethean imagination may take wing, but—in yet another reprise of the 'sedentary' motif—always returns home ('Mais il revient, mais il s'assoit' (But he returns, but he sits down)) to take up abode in the 'serenity' of the classical. Of all the traditions he incarnates, 'laquelle donc en lui, littérairement, domine?' (which therefore in him, from a literary point of view, dominates?). The answer comes without delay: 'L'élément classique', where *classique* is now given a 'broad' definition very different from the 'enlarged' definition proposed in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?': 'Le classique en effet, dans son caractère le plus général et dans sa plus large définition, comprend les littératures à l'état de santé et de fleur heureuse' (The classic indeed, in its most general characteristics and its broadest definition, comprises literatures in a condition of flourishing health).[68]

In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' the terms of definition are essentially descriptive and indeed could hardly be otherwise, as a condition of opening the Pantheon to a wide variety of different kinds of writing. The normative also figures in the criteria, but in a form so general as to be able to leave the definition eclectically open to the variegated. In 'De la tradition', with the meaning of *classique* drifting from 'classic' to 'classical', there is a corresponding displacement of the descriptive by the normative. 'Health' as the touchstone of

[68] *CL* xv. 40.

[69] These values come straight out of Boileau's lexicon (what, in the *Réflexions sur Longin*, he described as 'un point de solidité et de maturité' (quoted in Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 2).

[70] 'Tout pays qui a un vif sentiment de sa nationalité ne saurait manquer d'une littérature' (All countries that have a lively feeling for nationality will not be lacking a literature) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 35).

[71] *CL* iii. 46. [72] *CL* xv. 368–9.

a classical literature takes over the definition entirely,[69] and the elaboration of what it means to be 'healthy' marks the point at which Sainte-Beuve's argument starts to deteriorate alarmingly. Literatures 'à l'état de santé et de fleur heureuse' (in a healthy and flourishing condition) are

> les littératures en plein accord et en harmonie avec leur époque, avec leur cadre social, avec les principes et les pouvoirs dirigeants de la société; contentes d'elles-mêmes,—entendons-nous bien, contentes d'être de leur nation, de leur temps, du régime où elles naissent et fleurissent (la joie de l'esprit, a-t-on dit, en marque la force; cela est vrai pour les littératures comme pour les individus); les littératures qui sont et qui se sentent chez elles, dans leur voie, non déclassées, n'ayant pas pour principe le *malaise*, qui n'a jamais été un principe de beauté.
>
> literatures fully in accord and harmony with their epoch, with their social framework, with the directing principles and powers of society; content in themselves—let us understand this correctly, content to be of their nation and their time, to be of the regime in which they are born and flourish (the joy of the mind, it has been said, is a mark of strength; this as true of literatures as of individuals), literatures that are and feel at home, on track, not declassed, not having *disquiet* as an informing principle, which has never been a principle of the beautiful.[70]

In a sense, there is a big idea here (the idea of a literature harmoniously adjusted to its own spiritual and mental universe[71]) struggling to get out from under a small one, but failing miserably to do so, smothered by the sheer complacency of the latter's qualifying terms. A classical epoch is one whose durability permits the thought 'qu'on a un beau champ à une carrière' (that there is ample space for a career); it is what supplies a 'sentiment de sécurité et d'une saison fixe et durable' (a feeling of security and the sense of a fixed and durable season); a time that is free from *complaint* ('la littérature classique ne se plaint pas, ne gémit pas' (classical literature does not complain, does not moan)); the classic—*le classique* (noun and adjective are now being used interchangeably)—'a cela, au nombre de ses caractères, d'aimer sa patrie, son temps, de ne voir rien de plus désirable ni de plus beau; il en a le légitime orgueil. *L'activité dans l'apaisement* serait sa devise' (has, amongst its many characteristics, that of loving its fatherland, its time, which sees nothing as either more desirable or more beautiful; of which it is legitimately

[73] See the comment on Mathurin Marais as 'un pur classique à sa date … il a le goût sain' (for his time, a classic of the purest kind … he has healthy taste), the classic now subordinated to a model of cultural health shaped by the example of the seventeenth century ('les auteurs favoris de Marais' are the 'grands écrivains du siècle précédent' (Marais's favourite authors … [the] great writers of the preceding century)) (*NL* ix. 43, 45).

[74] *CL* xv. 369.

[75] T. S. Eliot was to say virtually the same: the 'classical moment' is 'a moment of stasis, when the creative impulse finds a form which satisfies the best intellect of the time, a moment when a type is produced' (quoted in Kermode, *The Classic*, 68).

proud. *Activity in appeasement* would be its motto).[72] The italicized, and thus advertised, terms of this account hardly constitute the most rousing clarion call on behalf of either the classic or the classical. Rarely do Sainte-Beuve's tropes let him down so badly. Literatures at one with themselves are literatures that are, precisely, 'non déclassées' (the pun is doubtless intended), content to stay at home, in contrast to the 'wandering' spirit of romantic literatures ('volontiers ailleurs, errantes'), where home means primarily 'nation' and 'patrie' ('notre belle patrie').[73] Our beautiful fatherland is moreover a reference not to the seventeenth century but to the present of the Second Empire, in which the spirit of the former might be reinvented:

> Oh! Que si un jour, dans notre belle patrie, dans notre cité principale de plus en plus magnifique, qui nous la représente si bien, nous nous sentions heureux, sincèrement heureux d'en être; que si surtout les jeunes âmes … se sentaient heureuses de vivre dans un temps, dans un régime social qui permet et favorise tous les beaux mouvements de l'humanité … oh! Alors l'équilibre entre les talents et le milieu, entre les esprits et le régime social, se trouverait établi; on se retrouverait à l'unisson; la lutte, la maladie morale cesseraient, et la littérature elle-même redeviendrait classique par les grandes lignes et par le fond (c'est l'essentiel) … Nous recommencerions peut-être à avoir des monuments.
>
> Ah, if one day, in our beautiful fatherland, in our increasingly magnificent capital city which represents the former so well, we could feel ourselves happy, sincerely happy, to be part of it; if above all the young … were to feel happy at living in a time, under a social regime which permits and favours all the beautiful motions of humanity … ah! Then the equilibrium between talents and environment, between minds and the social regime, would be established; we would find ourselves at one; struggle, moral sickness, would cease, and literature itself would become classical again in its general outlines and in its substance (that is the essential point) … We would perhaps begin again to have monuments.[74]

This sprawling quotation is already a much reduced version of what must be the longest conditional sentence in the Beuvian œuvre. Even as it waxes eloquent, it hedges its bets, a precaution strengthened with a tacked-on footnote replacing the indicative mood of the verbs *permet* and *favorise* by the subjunctive *permît* and *favorisât* as closer to capturing the 'vraie nuance de ma pensée'.[75] Yet, for all the prudent equivocations, the dream of resurrecting the classical temper in contemporary conditions remained active, and we know of course what the Second Empire regime was to do in practice with the 'classical' in the creation of its own architectural 'monuments'. Sainte-Beuve's attempt to bring the past to the present represented little more than a reduction of

[76] *CL* xv. 370–1 (emphasis in original). [77] *CL* xv. 370. [78] *CL* xv. 371–2.
[79] *CL* xv. 371–2 n. Raphaël Molho makes much of this 'nuance' (*L'Ordre et les ténèbres ou la naissance d'un mythe du XVIIe siècle chez Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1972), 390).

classical 'harmony' to pure accommodation. The effects on his literary thinking were disastrous. In 'De la tradition' the classical is billed as 'rational' ('la raison toujours doit présider et préside en définitive' (reason must always preside and indeed does so definitively)[76]). This was a straight inversion of the position outlined in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', where the grip of 'reason' on (largely French) conceptions of the classic was held to be a kind of strangulation.[77] 'Reason' now occupies the very centre of the operative definitions and signifies little more than the sweet reasonableness of conformity, *apaisement* as peaceful coexistence with a manufactured national consensus. This was an impoverished version of what Boileau had meant by 'raison' or 'bon sens',[78] and whatever Goethe meant by the 'healthy', it certainly was not this notion of the classic or the classical as the instrument of a prescribed doxology.

To be sure, this was not a position that Sainte-Beuve could occupy without to some extent shifting uneasily in his 'chair' (in the various institutional and metaphorical senses of the term). He thus admonishes his students not to confuse the defence of the tradition with the comforts of the 'sedentary': 'S'endormir dans la tradition est un danger qui nous menace peu. On n'est plus au temps où, quand on naissait dans une capitale, on n'en sortait pas. Il s'est vu des classiques qui se sont amollis à la seconde génération, qui sont devenus sédentaires et casaniers' (Falling aslep in the tradition is not for us a great risk. We are no longer of the time when, having been born in a capital, we do not leave it. We have seen classical dispositions which have grown soft by the second generation, which have become sedentary and house-bound).[79] This was unlikely to have carried much conviction, given what he had already said on the virtues of the sedentary in respect of Goethe. His unease is plainly there in the concession to the spirit of the new: 'Ce n'est pas moi, messieurs, qui médirai les littératures romantiques. On ne naît pas quand on veut, on ne choisit pas son moment pour éclore' (It is not

[80] *CL* xv. 368. [81] *CL* iii. 43–4.

[82] As Fumaroli notes, in Boileau's *Art poétique* 'raison' and 'bon sens' are the guiding concepts, where 'raison', however, is not Descartes's reason but the 'orationis ratio' of Cicero and 'bon sens' derived from Horace's 'judicium'. In other words, although the term *goût* does not figure here (it will be used a year later by Racine in the preface to *Iphigénie*), Boileau's lexicon is governed by a social and rhetorical discourse of taste and tact of the antique type ('Les Abeilles et les araignées', 154–5). In the context of the *querelle* it was not designed merely to promote the cause of consensual *apaisement*, but was rather a weapon aggressively deployed against the Modern's model of 'rationality'. In his 1829 article on Boileau, Sainte-Beuve was less impressed by the ideal of 'bon sens' (describing it as 'la manière un peu vulgaire du bons sens' (the slightly vulgar mode of common sense), and then later as 'cette timidité du bon sens' (that timidity of common sense) (*PL* 10, 17). Sainte-Beuve also maintained (in his article on Pasquier) that 'bon sens' and 'bon goût' were not always coincident; it was only in the seventeenth century that they came together (*CL* iii. 256).

[83] *CL* xv. 374.

I, gentlemen, who will speak ill of romantic literatures. We do not choose the moment of our birth, we do not choose our moment for blossoming).[80] But, if now removing his academic robe to don once more his hat as critic, this was what Sainte-Beuve thought the students wanted to hear, it does look like a case of protesting too much. The disclaimer presumes they might well have had grounds for suspecting the exact opposite. And, if the intention was not to speak ill of the modern, it was certainly to issue a warning against an overvaluing of the new. It comes perhaps then as no surprise that elsewhere Sainte-Beuve confers on tradition the aura of the 'divine': 'la tradition, cette voix divine, comme disaient les Anciens, et qui maintient et remet le chanteur dans le ton juste' (tradition, that divine voice as the Ancients put it, which maintains and restores the singer to the right note).[81] One can read this, of course, as merely the dead traces of belletrist hyperbole (Beuvian criticial prose is littered with such remnants), but, if it is not quite the transcendental chauvinism of Nisard, the underlying attitude does appear to be moving in that direction.

## III

This is the pedagogical snapshot of the 'tradition' that Sainte-Beuve gave to what one would like to imagine as the restive audience of students at the École Normale Supérieure.[82] Was this, they may well have asked themselves, what we are being called upon to 'transmit' to posterity, a version of the classic underwriting a view of the Second Empire as a potential model of cultural 'health'? However much Sainte-Beuve exploited and modified the grammar of his formulation, it is a view that we shall encounter again and again. The students may have found their spirits lowered even further by another aspect of this conception of the culture of the classic: the place in it reserved for the 'minor' work or what he called the 'moyen'. Sainte-Beuve's *grand siècle* is far from being just one thing; its coherence is not bought at the price of an imposed uniformity. In the first place, it is internally differentiated according to an evolving history in which the high 'classical' moment, properly

[84] *CL* xv. 370. [85] *CL* v. 334.

[86] In his biography of Haussmann, Michel Carmona informs us that 'as some of the students or former students of the elite teacher training college, the École Normale Supérieure, had been led astray by leftist ideas, it was decided to do away with the *agrégation* examination in philosophy and history so that future teachers could return to their true vocation, the transmission of the values of literary culture' (*Haussmann: His Life and Times and the Making of Modern Paris*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Chicago, 2002), 170). It seems that Sainte-Beuve's students were not appropriately malleable.

speaking, belongs to but a few decades of the century.[83] Secondly, its nature as a 'classical' culture is not coterminous with its having produced a number of 'classics' in the sense of canonical works: 'Pour maintenir la tradition, il ne suffit point toutefois de la bien rattacher à ses monuments les plus élevés et les plus augustes' (In order to maintain the tradition, it nevertheless does not suffice to link it to its most elevated and august monuments).[84] This echoes a point also made, though less prominently, in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?': 'Quelques écrivains de talent, en effet, doués d'originalité et d'une verve d'exception, quelques efforts brillants, isolés mais sans suite, aussitôt brisés et qu'il faut recommencer toujours, ne suffisent pas pour doter une nation de ce fonds solide et imposant de richesse littéraire' (Indeed, a smattering of talented writers, endowed with originality and exceptional verve, a handful of brilliant efforts, isolated but without follow-up, no sooner broken than having to begin again, do not suffice for conferring on a nation that solid and imposing stock of literary wealth).[85] What feeds into this endowment of cultural capital is not just the aura of the 'monumental' but also the less exalted input of what Sainte-Beuve called the 'moyen', the middling and the mediocre.

The term 'moyen' figures in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', where, however, it straddles two quite separate arguments that need to be disentangled. The first of these (centred on the status of 'les écrivains d'un ordre moyen' (writers of the middling range)) is an argument rehearsed in the war of definitions, in particular Sainte-Beuve's rejection of the 'abusive' tendency of 'la théorie latine' to promote the qualities of a particular kind of writing—the cited exemplars of which are Horace, Boileau, and Pope—as the universal criterion of the classic *tout court*: 'On y fait entrer surtout des conditions de régularité, de sagesse, de modération et de raison' … En ce sens, les classiques par excellence, ce seraient les écrivains d'un ordre moyen, justes, sensés, élégants, toujours nets, d'une passion noble encore, et d'une force légèrement voilée' (Into them are imported above all the conditions of regularity, wisdom, moderation, and reason … In this sense, the classics par excellence would be writers of the middling range, sound, sensible, elegant, always clear, with still an element of noble passion and of lightly veiled strength).[86] He was subsequently to modify this stricture, in a new valuing of what had been relegated to the 'second' rank in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. As we have already seen, in 'De la tradition' it takes the form of reasserting the primacy of rational good taste. In the 1861 review of Taine, he will return in particular to the case of Pope, in the context of a more general argument regretting the modern neglect of the literary 'moderates' and calling for an appropriate rebalancing of the criteria of

[87] *CL* vi. 173–4. [88] *CL* xv. 373. [89] *CL* iii. 40. [90] *CL* iii. 43.

judgement.[87] But, whatever the shifting priorities here, Sainte-Beuve's initial objection was never to the writers and the values they stood for, but only to their hypostasis as the very essence of the 'classic(al)', and it would never have occurred to him to position Horace, Boileau, and Pope as anything other than 'major', even if they do not belong with the 'five or six' blazing geniuses of mankind.[88]

The 'minor classic', properly speaking, is a different matter altogether, and in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' is illustrated by a sliding scale of inclusiveness that runs from Shakespeare ('le plus grand des classiques sans le savoir' (unselfconsciously the greatest of the classics)) to the 'tout dernier des classiques en diminutif' (the least of the classics in miniature), illustrated by the example of the early nineteenth-century neoclassical critic Andrieux.[89] Sainte-Beuve revealed a soft spot for Andrieux as early as 1833 when he wrote an obituary piece whose *envoi* is a gesture of affectionate placing in the history of polite literary culture ('Son nom restera dans la littérature française, tant qu'un sens s'attachera au mot de *goût*' (His name will remain in French

[91] In the review of Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Pope re-emerges under the description of 'le classique dans toute sa correction et sa concise élégance' (the classic in its fully correct and concisely elegant form) (*NL* viii. 103). But where in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' these are the attributes of a view of the classic that he treats with some reserve, here Taine—and by extension the nineteenth century generally—is rebuked for not giving them their proper due ('un certain côté trop menacé et qu'on méprise trop aujourd'hui, après lui avoir tout accordé autrefois … J'insiste donc parce que le danger aujourd'hui est dans le sacrifice des littérateurs et poètes que j'appellerai modérés' (a certain aspect today excessively threatened and despised after having been previously granted everything … I insist therefore because the danger today lies in sacrificing the writers and poets I term moderate) (viii. 112, 115). It is to be noted, however, that the new appreciation of Pope is linked to a certain 'fatigue' with the excesses of modern taste: 'je le sais, la doctrine du trop, de l'exagération dite légitime, de la monstruosité même, prise pour marque du génie, est à l'ordre du jour: je demande à n'en être que sous toute réserve; j'habite volontiers en deça, et j'ai gardé de mes vieilles habitudes littéraires le besoin de ne pas me fatiguer et même le désir de me plaire à ce que j'admire' (I am well aware of it, the doctrine of excess, of so-called legitimate exaggeration, even of monstrosity, taken as the mark of genius, is all the fashion: I ask only to be a party to this with every reservation; my preference is to live somewhere beyond that, and I have retained from old literary habits the need not to tire myself and even the desire to take pleasure in what I admire) (viii. 95). The pleasures of reading Horace are also of this countervailing type. In the appendix to *Étude sur Virgile*, Horace is identified as 'le dernier des Anciens auprès de ceux qui n'auront guère familiarité ni liaison étroite avec d'autres' (the last of the Ancients for those who will have scarcely any acquaintance with or close relation to the others) (a view echoed in the article on Daru (*CL* ix. 445)). The closeness of Horace, however, proves to be little more than the cosy intimacy of a soothing relaxant, an antidote to the strains of modern life, the sort of writer with whom one spends the odd 'quarter of an hour' while travelling (*Étude sur Virgile* (Paris, 1857), 469–70). We seem to be back in the armchair fantasy of the concluding moments of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. As for Boileau, on the other hand, he could never quite grant to Boileau the writer, as distinct from the critic, the accolades he reserved for Horace and Pope; in the genre of the satires, 'Boileau est fort inférieur à Horace et à Pope' (Boileau is far inferior to Horace and Pope) (*CL* vi. 503).

[92] *PL* 350 and *CL* xv. 367.

[93] *CL* iii. 50.

literature for as long as a meaning is attached to the word *taste*)).[90] But, if in this connection Andrieux merits a respectful footnote, how he graduates from there to the foothills of Parnassus is something of a mystery; 'diminutive' certainly, but a diminutive *classic*? By any standards, the incorporation of someone *so* 'minor' as to be virtually invisible on any conceivable landscape of the world's classics was to confuse the 'generous' with the reckless. Although Sainte-Beuve himself claimed to find a warrant for this in the authority of Cicero's *Orator*,[91] it is the sort of thing that has done irreparable harm to Sainte-Beuve's reputation,[92] often identified moreover as one of the causes for the emergence of *lansonisme*, that dispiriting contraction of the discipline of literary history to a form of bibliomania. We may well feel that, for example, two consecutive articles on that nonentity, the marquis de Lassay, mentioned here and there in Saint-Simon's memoirs and himself the 'author'[93] of the unprepossessingly titled *Recueil de différentes choses*, reflect a loss of proportion, modulating to outright obsession when we discover that they are immediately followed by three articles on the long-forgotten eighteenth-century historian Duclos. We may similarly conclude that the larger critical view has narrowed to a squint when we are treated, at length, to an account of the journalism of Armand Carrel as having 'une place fort distinguée

[94] *PL* 203.

[95] 'C'est bien ici le lieu de rappeler ce que Cicéron a dit avec une grâce si judicieuse au commencement de son second traité de l'*Orateur*: il y a des places, même en poésie, après la première; il est honorable, tout en ayant celle-ci en vue et en idée, de s'arrêter à la seconde ou à la troisième. Toute la part n'est pas pour le seul Homère, ni pour Archiloque, ni pour Sophocle, ni pour Pindare, ces princes de leurs genres; il en reste encore pour leurs seconds, et même pour ceux qui seraient au-dessous de leurs seconds' (It is appropriate to recall here what Cicero said in such a judiciously graceful manner at the beginning of his second treatise in the *Orator*: there are, even in poetry, honourable ranks after the first: from precisely this intellectual point of view, it is honourable to pause at the second and third ranks. The field is not exhausted by Homer alone, nor by Archilochus, nor by Sophocles and Pindar, those princes in their genres; there is room also for the second-order writers, and even for those who come below them) ('Étude sur Quintus de Smyrne', in *Étude sur Virgile*, 419).

[96] Raymond Schwab remarks on Sainte-Beuve's 'aptitude for adding to the semi-talented what he detracted from the fully talented' (*The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 309); see also Curtius's tart comment: 'Standard Classicism is imitable and teachable. It is of advantage to the economy of a literature if a large stock of such goods is available. But the situation is alarming if the literature does not maintain a consciousness of the difference in level (which is at the same time a difference in essence)—and this should be the task of criticism. French Classicism did not avoid this danger, perhaps did not see it. This is true even of the great Sainte-Beuve. In his *Temple du goût* he reserves a place after Shakespeare for the "tout dernier des classiques en diminutif". His name is Andrieux' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 396).

[97] 'un homme de société et un amateur, non un auteur' (a man of the world and an amateur, not an author) (*CL* ix. 180).

dans l'histoire littéraire' (a very distinguished place in literary history)[94] or to the claim that the doctor-writer Vicq d'Azyr 'a été un des écrivains les plus distingués du règne de Louis XVI' (was one of the most distinguished writers of the reign of Louis XVI).[95] The notion of 'distinction' here, like the model of the 'classic' in association with Andrieux, seems to have undergone a serious deformation.

The full list of comparable examples from the *Lundis* and elsewhere is depressingly long. Yet it would be an error to construe this as merely antiquarian curiosity run amok. The emphasis on the 'minor' is in part designed as a way into understanding the broader culture that produces and underpins the national tradition. Understanding the culture is, first and foremost, understanding its language, and the latter endeavour requires a focus not only on the masterpieces but also on those writers and texts who belong somewhere in the 'middle' rank. The point of dwelling on the marquis de Lassay is that his writings can 'nous représenter au juste le ton de distinction et de bonne compagnie du dix-septième siècle' (represent exactly for us the mix of distinction and conviviality that characterizes the tone of the seventeenth century).[96] Similarly, Pasquier's prose is a link—a 'moyen terme'—in the 'chain' of the tradition:

> Enfin, Pasquier, dans ses bons endroits, nous offre le plus bel *ordinaire* de la langue au XVI siècle. Dans la chaîne de la tradition, il forme un terme moyen, un anneau solidaire entre les bons écrivains du XVe siècle, tels qu'Alain Chartier, et les bons écrivains du XVIIe siècle, tels que Patru ou Bourdaloue.
>
> In a word, Pasquier, where he is sound, offers us the most beautiful form of *ordinariness* in the language of the sixteenth century. In the great chain of the tradition, he constitutes a middle term, a solid link between the sound writers of the fifteenth century, such as Alain Chartier, and the sound writers of the seventeenth century, such as Patru and Bourdaloue.[97]

Whence Sainte-Beuve's description of his approach to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the public lectures in Liège devoted to the history of French literature. The latter have not survived in published form, but some of their aims were outlined in the introduction to the book that emerged from the companion course of lectures, *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*:

> La langue moyenne d'une époque se rencontre plus sûrement chez les écrivains qui ne songent pas à l'être, ou qui le sont sans grande distinction originale … La vraie langue d'une époque ne doit pas se chercher exclusivement chez les écrivains célèbres … ainsi encore aux époques si belles du dix-septième siècle et du dix-huitième siècle, à travers les intervalles des chefs-d'œuvre, je serai attentif à vous faire sentir le vrai ton, la

[98] *CL* vi. 145. [99] *CL* x. 277. [100] *CL* ix. 180. [101] *CL* iii. 257–8.

vraie saveur de la langue, non pas seulement chez les Pascal, les Bossuet, les Sévigné, c'est-à-dire aux lèvres des souverains génies, mais autour d'eux, chez ceux qui ne sont auteurs que par accident, chez un gentilhomme qui écrit au débotté sur ses négociations ou sur ses guerres, chez un religieux qui dresse des instructions pour ses moines, ou encore, comme le disait Paul-Louis Courier, chez *la moindre femmelette* de ce temps-là … La qualité générale d'une langue (toute part légitime faite aux chefs-d'œuvre) se saisit mieux dans ces exemples tirés du milieu de la société.

The mean of a period's language is more certainly encountered in those writers who do not see themselves as writers, or who are writers lacking great original distinction … The true language of a period is not to be found exclusively in its great writers … thus while still speaking of those beautiful periods, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the intervals of presenting the masterpieces, I shall attend to giving you a feel for the true tone, the true flavour of the language, not only in the Pascals, the Bossuets, the Sévignés, that is, from the lips of the sovereign geniuses, but, surrounding them, in those who are authors only by accident, in the company of a gentleman who writes off-the-cuff about his negotiations or his wars, of a monk who drafts instructions for his fellow-monks, or even, as Paul Louis-Courier put it, of the most insignificant female of that time … The general quality of a language (discounting what legitimately belongs to its masterpieces) is best grasped in these examples from the middle ground of society.[98]

This is closer in intellectual inspiration to the preoccupations of Lanson than to their adulteration by his wretched offspring, that is, to a conception of literary history as a hermeneutic enterprise whereby the horizons of a past *mentalité* are best grasped via works deemed to hold a certain 'representative' value.[99] Representativeness was one of the avenues down which Sainte-Beuve's thinking about the classic could join with his reflections on the making of a 'tradition'. Thus Mathurin Marais can be described as 'un pur classique à sa date' (in its time a pure classic) by virtue of being 'une de ces figures secondaires, mais non vulgaires et nullement effacées, qui peuvent servir

[102] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 29–30.

[103] 'The attention to minor and sometimes minimal writers follows from the whole concept of historical representativeness' (René Wellek, 'Sainte-Beuve', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven, 1965), 42). A similar view of the sixteenth century is to be found in the article on Pasquier, in the distinction between the 'génies tout individuels' (Rabelais and Montaigne) and those 'qui usèrent vaillamment ou sainement des ressources de la langue à cette époque de confusion et de lutte, et qui, en l'appliquant selon les besoins divers, y mirent encore moins l'empreinte de leur génie propre que celle du parti et de la classe auxquels ils appartenaient. Ces écrivains, militaires ou magistrats, en même temps qu'ils se représentent eux-mêmes, nous représentent aussi et nous figurent les hommes de leur bord, de leur robe ou de leur camp' (who deployed, valiantly or soundly, the resources of the language in that period of confusion and conflict, and who, in applying it to diverse needs, imprinted it less with the stamp of their own genius than with that of the party and the class to which they belonged. These writers, soldiers, or magistrates, at the same time that they represent themselves, also represent and describe for us men of their kind, their colour or their camp) (*CL* iii. 250).

à personnifier une génération et toute une classe d'esprits. C'est un esprit français, bourgeois, de bon aloi et bonne trempe' (one of those secondary figures, but not vulgar and by no means forgotten, which can serve to personify a generation and a whole class of minds. His is a French mind, bourgeois, worthy, and well-tempered).[100] The correspondance of Mme du Deffand merits rescuing from oblivion as 'un des classiques par la langue et par la pensée … Elle est avec Voltaire, dans la prose, le classique le plus pur de cette époque' (one of the classics in language and thought … She is in the sphere of prose, along with Voltaire, the purest among the classical writers of that epoch).[101] The memoirs of Gourville (La Rochefoucauld's secretary) are a worthy expression of 'une époque où les honnêtes gens avaient le dessus' (an epoch when honest folk had the upper hand), their author 'y tient son coin original et distingué' (holds an original and distinguished corner of his own).[102] In Patin's free-speaking letters we find the spirit of the Fronde ('un état d'opposition et de Fronde continuelle' (a state of opposition and continual rebellion)) from the point of view of the independent 'honnête homme' ('on sent dans tout cela l'honnête homme' (one senses through it all the man of breeding)),[103] while another epistolary collection, Collé's correspondence, qualifies as 'ce classique de la gaudriole' (that classic of bawdy).[104]

We may take further this construal of second-order writers as embodying a type of the classic by way of the telling contrast drawn by Fumaroli between the respective attitudes of Sainte-Beuve and Proust. The latter's contempt for the former's readiness to allow the minor to eclipse the major is of course well known (Vicq d'Azyr is one of his examples). Fumaroli concedes the fact of Sainte-Beuve's inveterate interest in the mediocre, but not as the ground of an accusation. For this to stand, Proust and Sainte-Beuve would have to have inhabited the same universe of literary values. But their difference in fact reflects a fundamental divergence over the social meaning of literature. For Proust, literature is essentially an asocial phenomenon, a view consonant with the modern image of the *poète maudit* (to which Proust wanted to enlist none other than Racine, with the claim that Racine was more 'immoral' than

[104] *NL* ix. 4. [105] *CL* i. 412–13. [106] *CL* v. 379. [107] *CL* viii. 119, 117.

[108] *NL* vii. 372. The reductio of this approach is the review of the memoirs of the nineteenth-century politician Coulmann, commended precisely for the degree to which their complete absence of 'originality' is directly proportional to their symptomatically representative status: 'A vrai dire, M. Coulmann me plaît dans ces mémoires, par ce côté même d'absence de toute originalité: il est l'expression honnête et facile du milieu où il vit, et il nous en marque la température assez exacte, sans y mêler la résistance ou le surcroît d'un caractère trop individuel' (To tell the truth, M. Coulmann, in his memoirs, pleases me precisely by virtue of his lack of originality: he is the honest and straightforward expression of the milieu in which he lives, and whose temperature he exactly registers, undisturbed by any addition of individuality) (*NL* ix. 141).

Baudelaire,[105] a proposition at which Sainte-Beuve would have blenched). For Sainte-Beuve literature is social through and through, albeit that 'society' here is restricted to the customs and pleasures of an educated elite. Proust—rightly—maintained that in Sainte-Beuve the 'social' is all too often indistinguishable from the 'worldly' (a point that, given his own preconceptions, leaves Fumaroli massively unruffled). There remains nevertheless a deep incommensurability: where for Proust the condition of the artist is that of the solitary outsider, for Sainte-Beuve it is bound up with a form of gregarious sociability and shared participation in a collective undertaking: 'Proust n'a pas voulu voir que, pour Sainte-Beuve, la littérature française est une institution nationale, et sa chronique du *Constitutionnel* une contribution vigilante à la santé de l'institution … où les talents de divers ordres … puissent venir se faire reconnaître et consacrer publiquement' (Proust did not want to see that, for Sainte-Beuve, French literature was a national institution and his column in *Le Constitutionnel* a vigilant contribution to the health of that institution … in which talents of diverse kinds … could come together for public recognition and consecration).[106] It is, broadly, the difference between the *thesaurus* and the *tabula rasa* models (the former as the 'treasury' or what Sainte-Beuve terms the 'fonds solide' and 'richesse littéraire' that constitute the tradition, the latter in principle more congenial to romantic notions of creative originality).[107] In the article on Villemain, it is figured as a boat whose passengers include both the outstanding 'génie créateur' and the more modest 'talents distingués'.[108] The journey is not just about the great discoveries of new lands, but also about the seaworthiness of the vessel, the often unseen labour of its construction and its maintenance. Grasping the national literary tradition involves a profound respect for its *routines*.[109]

[109] Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1971), 641.

[110] Marc Fumaroli, 'La Coupole', in Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de memoire*, pt. 2, *La Nation*, iii. 327.

[111] *PC* ii. 360. On the modification in Sainte-Beuve's time of the *thesaurus* model by the more modern stress on the *tabula rasa*, see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 396. This may account for Fidao-Justiniani's categorical rejection of Sainte-Beuve's view: 'On peut dire que les petits classiques ne sont pas des classiques' (One can say that the small classics are not classics) (*Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?* (Bloud, 1929), 181).

[112] *PC* ii. 360.

[113] On the other hand, Sainte-Beuve was fully aware that this could all too easily become a form of antiquarianism. He compliments the critics of the First Empire for having avoided this danger: 'Ces critiques distingués qui signalèrent l'ouverture du siècle furent utiles; ils eurent l'originalité dans le bon sens net et vigoureux avec lequel ils résistèrent à des admirations prolongées, et qui allaient s'égarant sur des écrivains de second ou de troisième ordre' (Those distinguished critics who marked the opening of the century were useful; they showed originality in the clear and vigorous common sense with which they resisted prolonged applause, wildly extended to writers of the second or third ranks) (*CL* i. 391). See also the article on Marivaux for the view that the 'grain sur grain' additions of the 'grands médiocres' can never approximate the achievements of the great individuals (*CL* ix. 346–7).

This was clearly one of the things Sainte-Beuve had in mind when, in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', he recycled the proverbial 'il y a plus d'une demeure dans la maison de mon père'. The quotation follows on immediately from the reference to the diminutive Andrieux, but, if the proverb was designed to rationalize bringing the 'minor' into the mansion of the classic, its potential when applied to the global perspective of world literature was obviously limited. It was far less so when Sainte-Beuve turned his attention more to the national literary heritage (and it is perhaps no accident that the example of the 'diminutive' chosen for 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' was a French one). In this context, the mediocre could be assigned a dutiful place in a common pursuit. Alongside Rabelais, Tallemant's burlesque *Historiettes* are insignificant, but, if he writes 'dans un genre après tout peu élevé … médiocrement honorable' (a relatively lowly genre … meagrely honourable), it remains nonetheless an honourable offering: 'chacun donne ce qu'il peut' (each gives as he can).[110] Similarly, if we find ourselves growing mildly impatient with the three articles devoted to Duclos, we also find Sainte-Beuve surprising himself: 'Je ne croyais pas aujourd'hui que cette considération de Duclos historien dût me mener si loin' (I did not believe today that this reflection on Duclos the historian was to take me so far). If it has done so, it is because Duclos is, in his own field, the embodiment of 'la voie moyenne' (the middle way).[111] The conclusion drawn is of the same order as the message attached to the review of Tallemant, only this time in openly exhortatory mode: 'Qui que nous soyons et dans quelque genre que la vocation ou la destinée nous ait poussés, tâchons d'être de ceux-là; tâchons, un jour ou l'autre, d'arriver à la perfection de ce qui nous est donné de faire' (Whoever we are and whatever the genre to which vocation and destiny have impelled us, let us try to be as one of these; let us try to achieve, some time or another, perfection in what has been given to us to do).[112] The *Voyage* of Chapelle et Bachaumont is a mere bagatelle, but 'une bagatelle qui a pris rang après les chefs-d'œuvre, et qui est réputée classique en son genre' (a trifle holding a certain rank after the masterpieces and that is reputed to be a classic of its genre).[113] By the same token, the writings of Delécluze may not set the pulse racing, but 'que voulez-vous? On a ses mesures et ses degrés: on est aussi des classiques dans son genre et à sa manière' (what can you expect? There are measures and degrees: one can also be a classic in one's genre and after one's manner.)[114]

In these various accounts, we should take special note of the regular appearance of the term *genre*; it is the pivot on which the *moyen* can accede to the status of the (minor) classic. The view of literary culture as made from a

[114] *CL* xiii. 188. [115] *CL* ix. 245. [116] *CL* ix. 244.
[117] *CL* xi. 36. [118] *NL* iii. 124.

plurality of genres, many of which would go unrecognized within the modern conception of literature as specialized and separable aesthetic artefact, was also a seventeenth-century idea, while at the same time rejoining the even older notion of 'literature' as 'letters'.[115] It also entailed the belief that, while a given genre can house a range of qualitatively different performances, on a spectrum from the grand to the humble, each, in its own way, contributed to the whole; the *moyen* in the literary domain was the aesthetic equivalent of the Aristotelian 'mean' in the sphere of ethics.[116] Sainte-Beuve was deeply influenced by this idea, especially in connection with genres of speech and writing associated with institutional ritual. They reflected an orderly division of cultural labour in the modern world, whereby the principle of each to his own ('chacun donne ce qu'il peut') grafted specialization of form and function onto the unified fabric of collective literary production.[117] The genres in question were all 'minor': the academic *éloge* and *notice* (of which Fontenelle was the 'premier maître'[118]), the sermon,[119] the university lecture ('ce genre semi-oratoire'[120]), in all of which rhetorical skill is matched to ceremonial occasion. In the article on the Académie française Sainte-Beuve remarks of the *éloge*: 'Ce genre, à son tour, a été assez décrié depuis. Je le regrette. Bien choisi, pris dans son cadre, touché avec goût et bienséance, l'éloge académique, le discours académique a son prix' (This genre, in turn, has since been much disparaged. I regret this. Well chosen, handled within its own frame of reference, laced with a touch of taste and decorum, the academic encomium, the academic discourse has its own value).[121] Its more elaborated justification comes in the article on Vicq d'Azyr:

[119] In associating the definition of *classique* with the classroom, Furetière's Dictionary stressed the multiplicity of genres and disciplines in the educational syllabus (Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 2).

[120] On the link between the 'mediocre' and the Aristotelian 'mean' in the seventeenth century, see Jacques Morel, 'Médiocrité et perfection dans la France du XVIIe siècle', in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1969), 442.

[121] Sainte-Beuve's interest in genre as a collective phenomenon provides a distinctive inflection of the 'biographical' method, away from the individual towards the social (what, in connection with tragedy, he once called the 'biographie collective de tout un genre si considérable' (collective biography of the whole of such an important genre) (*NL* iii. 354). But for a view of the generic universe of the seventeenth century as far more fluid and unstable, see Christian Jouhaud, *Les Pouvoirs de la littérature: Histoire d'un paradoxe* (Paris, 2000).

[122] *CL* x. 11. In the article on Halévy, Sainte-Beuve maintains that Fontenelle's *éloges* 'etablissent un genre littéraire nouveau' (establish a new literary genre) (*NL* ii. 233).

[123] *NL* v. 155.

[124] *NL* xii. 382. On the academic lecture as minor genre, see also the remarks on Guéneau de Mussy in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 329–55. This could extend even to the claim that scholarly works could be 'classics' in their own right. Havet's edition of Pascal's *Pensées* is 'savante et vraiment classique dans le meilleur sens du mot' (learned and truly a classic in the best sense of the term) (*CL* v. 525); Gilbert's edition of Vauvenargues is 'un classique de plus' (*CL* xiv. 3).

On dit volontiers du mal de la rhétorique, et à moi-même cela a pu arriver quelquefois: pourtant dans ces genres officiels et où la cérémonie entre pour quelque chose, dans ces sujets que l'on ne choisit pas et que l'on ne va pas chercher par goût, mais qui sont échus par le sort et imposés avec les devoirs d'une charge, il y a un art, une méthode et des procédés de composition qui soutiennent et qui sont nullement à dédaigner; si on peut les dénoncer et les blâmer par instants en les voyant trop paraître, on souffre encore plus lorsqu'ils sont absents et qu'au lieu d'un orateur on n'a plus devant soi qu'un narrateur inégal, à la merci de son sujet, avec tous les hasards de la superfluité ou de la sécheresse.

People willingly speak ill of rhetoric, and I myself have done so occasionally; nevertheless in these official genres, where ceremony counts for something, in these subjects that are not so much deliberately chosen or sought by predilection, but that fall to one by fate and are imposed by the duties of office, there is an art, a method and compositional procedures that sustain the genre and are by no means to be despised; if it is right to attack and blame them now and again when they are too much in evidence, we lose much more when they are absent and when, instead of an orator, all we have before us is a narrator who is not up to the task, at the mercy of his subject, along with all the risks of superfluity or aridity.[122]

## IV

This is the kind of passage that would doubtless have had Proust bridling, especially in the light of his withering views of Sainte-Beuve's treatment of Baudelaire's candidacy for election to the Académie (the *éloge* we never had). More generally, it reveals the extent to which Sainte-Beuve's account of the nature and foundations of the tradition is tied to a belief in the efficacy of institutions. Minor genres are a set of protocols, whose *raison d'être* consists in reproducing the social life of the institution, while constituting themselves as institutionalized literary practices in the informal sense of practices governed by a set of 'rules'. This, too, along with the idea of the 'tradition', was another seventeenth-century invention,[123] dedicated to creating a body of norms and values either by means of political power and the agencies of the state, or through the force of public opinion in the more diffuse yet still organized spheres of civil society; from 'la Cour'—principally through the medium of the Académie—came regulation, and from 'la Ville'—chiefly the salon and the private 'academy'—came conversation, as a variable mix, depending on the

[125] *CL* xiv. 216. [126] *CL* x. 298–9.

[127] Patrick Dandrey, 'Les Deux esthétiques du classicisme français', in Viala (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?*, 146), 152.

precise locale, of rigour, and brilliance, pleasure and austerity. In Vaugelas's famous prescription (almost certainly one of the sources for Sainte-Beuve's subsumption of the classic under the criterion of the 'healthy'), it was a system designed to project and disseminate 'la partie la plus saine de la Cour et de la Ville' (the healthiest part of Court and Town).[124]

It was a mix that Sainte-Beuve always admired and looked back to as a model of a socially integrated literary culture. This may account for another inclusion in the Pantheon of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', almost as surprising as that of Andrieux, namely Paul Pellisson, man of letters and man about town, loyal acolyte of Fouquet (the defeated rival of Colbert), and author of the graceful *Histoire de l'Académie*. Pellisson's ideal of civilized discourse was 'l'entretien libre, familier et naturel, semé partout des jeux, de la gaieté, de la civilité des honnêtes gens' (free, familiar, and natural intercourse, everywhere studded with the playfulness, gaiety, and civility of people of breeding).[125] Sainte-Beuve took note of Pellisson's history, in terms of a set of social and stylistic dispositions summarized under the heading of *urbanité*. It is difficult to think of a cultural value that mattered more to Sainte-Beuve; he will revert to it on numerous occasions as a defining feature of the truly classical sensibility (its opposite, as for T. S. Eliot, being the 'provincial').[126] In his remarks on Pellisson, he distinguishes two kinds or manifestations of the seventeenth-century urbane, one reflected in the effervescence of salon conversation, the other in the more learned exchanges of the literary and scholarly circle, Pellisson's being 'le parfait modèle' of the latter.[127] Although he modifies this judgement (seeing Pellison's style as contaminated by 'une première couche légère de provincialisme' (a light first coat of provincialism),[128] due no doubt to the identification elsewhere of 'l'urbanité de Pellisson' (Pellisson's urbaneness) with 'celle d'un bourgeois élégant et resté un peu sur l'étiquette et sur la cérémonie de la Cour' (that of an elegant bourgeois, to some extent constrained by the etiquette and ceremony of the Court)[129]), this would explain the otherwise puzzling addition of Pellisson to the list of the world's classics.

One of Sainte-Beuve's more forlorn hopes was for the recovery of something of this culture and its reinforcing institutions. For a (brief) time he thought he had found the conditions of its potential recreation in the First Empire: in the gatherings at Mme Récamier's salon at l'Abbaye-au-Bois, the meetings

[128] Claude de Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française* (Paris, 1647), quoted in Dandrey, 'Les Deux esthétiques du classicisme français', 153.

[129] Paul Pellisson, *Discours sur les œuvres de M. Sarasin* (Paris, 1656), quoted in Dandrey, 'Les Deux esthétiques du classicisme français', 161.

[130] In the article on Gasparin, 'urbanité' is opposed to 'provincialisme' (*NL* ix. 274).

[131] *CL* xiv. 195–6. [132] *CL* xiv. 197. [133] *CL* iii. 374.

at the Athénée, the deliberations of the Institut, above all in the 'group' around Chateaubriand (of which Mme Récamier's salon was the centre). 'Je suis resté bien classique, je l'avoue, en fait de salon' (I admit that, in the matter of the salon, my tastes have remained classical), Sainte-Beuve tells us, contrasting Mme Récamier's drawing room with that of the Catholic-legitimist Mme Swetchine.[130] But even these residual traces of the seventeenth-century aristocratic salon had a limited historical shelf life. By the time of the July Monarchy, the relevant institutions of civil society come more and more to resemble a gentlemen's club, populated by the 'graves Messieurs' of the new bourgeois order (the prime specimen of the modern type of vigorous mind being none other than Louis-Philippe's man, M. Molé),[131] a talking shop for a class of professionals, whose ponderous tones had little in common with the discourse 'semé partout des jeux, de la gaieté' that Pellisson had both prescribed and embodied.[132]

But if the nineteenth-century variants of 'la Ville' had changed beyond recognition, there was, notwithstanding periodic disruptions, another, much stronger line of continuity stretching across the centuries, linking 'Cour' and 'État'. When Sainte-Beuve looks to the seventeenth century for the institutional structures that buttress the 'tradition', it is above all on the public agencies of the state that he dwells. Of these the two most important were the Library and the Academy. During his stint at the Bibliothèque Mazarine, he took time out to research the career of its first librarian, Gabriel Naudé. The Library

[134] *NL* i. 225.

[135] Michel Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 20. Crépu himself takes very seriously this form of seriousness. Proust, on the other hand, remarks witheringly on 'la place énorme que tous les grands personnages politiques de la monarchie de Juillet tiennent dans son œuvre, où on ne peut faire un pas, dans ces salons où il assemble les interlocuteurs illustres, pensant que de la discussion jaillira la lumière, sans recontrer M. de Molé' (the vast amount of space that all the great political figures of the July Monarchy occupy in his work, where you cannot take one step into the salons where he assembles his illustrious interlocutors, imagining that from their debates will spring enlightenment, without meeting M. de Molé) (*Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 230).

[136] The privileged site of the agreeable talking shop for Sainte-Beuve remained the Académie française: 'Allons! l'Académie est encore le lieu de France où l'on parle le mieux de littérature et où l'on goûte le mieux toutes les aménités' (For goodness sake! the Academy is still the best place in France for deliberation on literature, where one can best taste its charms) (*NL* xii. 421). Fumaroli notes more elegiacally: 'Il [Sainte-Beuve] est devenu le principal témoin de la quête obstinée et malheureuse du XIXe siècle en vue d'une conversation qui le fuit' (He [Sainte-Beuve] became the principal actor in the stubborn and unhappy quest of the nineteenth century for a form of conversation that slips away from it) ('La Conversation', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt. 3, *Les France* (Paris, 1992), ii. 722). Lepenies astutely observes that the ideal model underlying Sainte-Beuve's conception of the Académie was the *salon*, a social rather than a formal institution, home to a 'company' preserving the arts of polite and intelligent exchange. But we might want to add that the model of the *salon* itself assumes a distinctly club-like aspect (*Sainte-Beuve*, 216–19).

('cette espèce d'institution') was a public utility; its principal virtue, beyond allowing unfettered access, consisted in its holdings of all manner of books, thus acting as the physical storehouse of the tradition as *thesaurus*, while Naudé himself belonged to a tradition in his own right, whose ancestors were the great librarians of the ancient world.[133] The institutional jewel in the crown, however, remained the Académie française, that 'haut jury' or 'haut tribunal littéraire', as—in Sainte-Beuve's own words—its founder, Richelieu, conceved it.[134] For Sainte-Beuve (never loath to confer lavish praise when his deepest sympathies were engaged), the cardinal was not only 'un patriote ardent pour la grandeur publique de l'État' (an ardent patriot on behalf of the public grandeur of the State) but also 'un des plus glorieux artisans politiques qui aient existé; et plus les générations auront été battues de révolutions et mûries de l'expérience, plus elles s'approcheront de sa mémoire avec circonspection et avec respect' (an ardent patriot on behalf the public grandeur of the State; one of the most glorious political artisans who has ever existed; and the more subsequent generations will have been battered by revolutions and ripened by experience, the more they will approach his memory with circumspection and respect).[135]

Yet Richelieu the centralizing administrator (along with his successor under Louis XIV, Colbert) was unthinkable without the institution of the monarchy. Behind the highly placed bureaucrat, there stood the awesome figure of the King. In the article on Bossuet, Sainte-Beuve muses on what the seventeenth century might have been without Louis. It is of course an idle musing, not because of its impossibly counterfactual status, but because the answer is given in advance (the seventeenth century would have amounted to far less): 'Car il y avait en Louis XIV et dans l'air qui l'environnait je ne sais quoi qui obligeait à ces qualités et à ces mérites tous ceux qui entraient dans la sphère du grand règne, et c'est en ce sens qu'on peut dire qu'il les leur conférait' (For there was in Louis XIV and in the air around him a certain something that required these qualities and merits in those who entered the sphere of his great rule, and it is in this sense that we can say that he conferred them).[136] He did so as much by example as through the exercise of power. Reviewing an edition of Louis's correspondence with the Maréchal de Noailles, Sainte-Beuve comments:

[137] *PL* 677, 678, 681. On Sainte-Beuve's interest in Naudé, see Paul Nelles, 'Renaissance and Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 61/3 (2000), 473–82.

[138] *CL* xiv. 209.

[139] *CL* vii. 233, 265. There is a minor irony in the fulsomeness of Sainte-Beuve's praise of Richelieu: the regulative notions of order and good taste represented by Richelieu so excite Sainte-Beuve that the language of his own summary betrays the very principles he defends, inducing finally a self-administered rap over the knuckles (see Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve*, 225).

[140] *CL* x. 208.

La phrase à la Louis XIV, ou qu'on appelle de ce nom, est ample, un peu longue, mais majestueuse. La langue que parlait le grand roi était réellement en accord avec celle que parlaient ou qu'écrivaient de son temps les plus éloquents et les mieux disants des écrivains; entre l'une et l'autre il y a convenance parfaite et harmonie.

The sentence in the Louis XIV manner, or what has been called such, is ample, a little long, but majestic. The language spoken by this great king was truly in accord with that spoken or written in his time by the most eloquent and well spoken of the writers; between one and the other there is perfect agreement and harmony.[137]

Here, then, we have the coordinates of the state-sponsored literary institution: on the one hand, the monarch, who confers legitimacy by virtue not only of his political authority but also his own exemplarity in matters of public taste, and, on the other hand, the functionary who ensures its efficient functioning, both jointly responsible for a body that stands alongside the other 'offices et charges' of the state, as a 'corps littéraire d'État' (a State-based literary profession), which opens to its members the possibility of a 'career' in the sense of a juridical, military, or diplomatic career (recall the description of a 'classical epoch' in 'De la tradition' as one where 'on a un beau champ à une carriére').[138] But there is also a third figure, onto whom Sainte-Beuve would in the nature of things have projected a much intenser charge of transferential affect: the critic who supplies a legislative poetics. At an early stage, this role is filled by Malherbe, who has the good fortune to see 'la politique de Henri IV reprise par une main ferme, et Richelieu souverain au profit de son maître, pour le bien et la grandeur de l'État' (the policy of Henri IV resumed with a firm hand, and Richelieu a sovereign authority to the benefit of his master, for the good and greatness of the state). What Malherbe ('Malherbe est monarchique') gets from royalty (political stability), he returns in the currency of poetics; criticism and politics blend in a self-reinforcing tourniquet. Malherbe brings to this settlement the 'action heureuse, salutaire, d'un seul homme qui est un vrai maître, le pouvoir et le bienfait d'une juste et ferme discipline venue à temps' (the happy, salutary action of a single man who is a true master, the power and benefit of a just and firm discipline that has arrived at the right moment).[139] But the relationship that really counts is of course that of Louis and Boileau, prompting yet another of Sainte-Beuve's rhetorically pitched counterfactual questions: 'Saluons et reconnaissons aujourd'hui la noble et forte harmonie du grand siècle. Sans Boileau, et sans Louis XIV qui reconnaissait Boileau comme son Contrôleur-général du Parnasse, que serait-il arrivé?' (Let us salute and acknowledge

[141] *NL* x. 65, 233.

[142] Fumaroli, 'La Coupole', 324, 329. Sainte-Beuve's invocation of this model of the 'career' is clearly designed to contrast with the purely economic model of the modern marketplace.

[143] *NL* xiii. 395, 424.

today the noble and strong harmony of the great century. Without Boileau, and without Louis XIV who recognized Boileau as his comptroller-general of Parnassus, what would have happened?). What, without this astonishing alliance of prince and poet, the seventeenth century would have suffered is precisely the lack that characterizes the nineteenth century: 'Savez-vous ce qui, de nos jours, a manqué à nos poètes … Il a manqué un Boileau et un monarque éclairé, l'un des deux appuyant et consacrant l'autre' (Do you know what, in our time, our poets are lacking … They lack a Boileau and an enlightened monarch, the one supporting and consecrating the other).[140] In theory, however, it was a lack that, under certain circumstances, including serious attention to the seventeenth century, could be remedied. Mobilizing the *grand siècle* to this end was naturally fraught with difficulty. In one of his letters, Sainte-Beuve made an interesting point about the use of modern historical method to recapture the seventeenth century: 'Grace à elle (cette méthode toute historique et positive) on admirera mieux les chefs d'œuvre du grand siècle qu'on se les représentera plus franchement à distance, dans le lointain où ils sont, et à leur vrai jour' ( Thanks to it (this fully historical and positive method), we shall be able better to admire the masterpieces of the great century the more we frankly represent them to ourselves from a distance, in the faraway place to which they belong, and in their true light).[141] If distance is a condition of both understanding and admiration, then the collapsing of that distance for contemporary purposes might seem perversely self-defeating; far better to emphasize irrecoverability and move on as best one can. Yet this Sainte-Beuve could not quite bring himself to do. Many of the remarks on Richelieu and the Académie française, for example, are not simply historical, but also reflections on what they could mean for the nineteenth century: in Richelieu's 'idées sur une sage administration et dispensation de la littérature' (ideas on a wise system for administering and authorizing literature) we can detect the proof of 'une haute prévoyance. On dirait véritablement qu'il a déjà le dix-huitième siècle et quelque chose du dix-neuvième devant les yeux' (great foresight. One could truly say that he already has in view the eighteenth century and something of the nineteenth century).[142] His interventions in the quarrel of *Le Cid* would constitute both in and for the nineteenth century 'une jurisprudence bien memorable' (a truly memorable jurisprudence).[143] Where the function of the Académie française as guardian of the language is

[144] *CL* vi. 511, 512. Sainte-Beuve may have derived the analogy of Boileau as the 'Contrôleur-général du Parnasse' from Bayle's remarks on Cardinal Duperron ('Bayle a appelé Du Perron le *procureur général* du Parnasse de son temps, comme qui dirait aujourd'hui le maître des cérémonies de la littérature' (Bayle called Du Perron the *attorney general* of the Parnassus of his time, in the way one might today speak of the master of ceremonies of literature) (*PL* 546).

[145] *Corr. gén.* v. 448. [146] *CL* vii. 262. [147] *CL* xiv. 210.

concerned,[144] while its task is to reject the 'rétrograde et réactionnaire'[145] in the name of an obligation to 'se tenir dans un rapport perpétuel avec le vivant' (maintain a perpetual relation with the living),[146] it should also act as a check to the excesses of 'democracy':

> La France, quels que soient son goût et ses voeux pour la liberté, est un pays où l'autorité, quand elle a pour elle l'ancienneté et la forme, ne deplaît pas. L'autorité de l'Académie, dans la mesure très-douce, presque toute honorifique et rémunératoire, où elle est appelée à s'exercer, ne pourrait donner d'ombrage que si une démocratie toute radicale venait à triompher. Dans une France, même démocratique, comme elle tend de plus en plus à le devenir, l'Académie française mérite de garder son rang et peut avoir son influence utile.
>
> France, whatever its appetite and wish for liberty, is a country where authority, when it is backed by ancient precedent and due form, does not displease. The authority of the Académie, in the gently cadenced proportions, almost entirely honorific and remunerative, in which it is called upon to exercise it, could cause offence only if a fully radical democracy were to triumph. Even in democratic France, as it now tends more and more to become, the Académie française deserves to keep its rank and may have a useful influence.[147]

This was a significant adaptation, albeit a softly-softly one ('très-douce'), of a venerable institution to the perceived needs of modernity. It is even more to the fore in Sainte-Beuve's comments on Vaugelas. Mixing metaphors with some abandon, he positions Vaugelas as 'la cheville ouvrière de l'Académie' (the kingpin of the Académie) and 'l'Arc de Triomphe de la France littéraire' (the Arc de Triomphe of literary France).[148] His rationalization of linguistic usage based on a (suitably polished) form of common parlance was a counter to the pedantries of the grammarians, but his relative openness to the spoken realities of the language was very far from a promiscuous welcoming of the idioms of the street. Vaugelas's codifications remain grounded in a normative social culture, derived from the intercourse of the court, and this holds an important lesson for the nineteenth century. Whatever the court is, it is most emphatically not democracy: 'Combien n'ai-je pas à dire encore et au

[148] 'un des sujets les plus nationaux en France' (one of the most national of subjects in France) (*CL* xiv. 213)

[149] *NL* xi. 213.

[150] *NL* ii. 246. In his longest piece on the history of the Académie, Sainte-Beuve describes Richelieu's 'institution monarchique' as dying with the French Revolution, briefly replaced by the Institut as a modern 'professional' body, and then revived in a reactionary moment under the successive secretaryships of Suard, Auger, and Andrieux, thus requiring a new lease of life ('il importe qu'en vivant elle se rajeunisse, dans un rapport vrai avec une société qui change' (it matters that, as a living thing, it rejuvenates itself, in a true relation to a changing society) (*NL* xii. 403–4, 426)).

[151] *NL* xii. 426.

[152] *NL* vi. 349, 392.

sujet de Vaugelas, et sur la différence profonde qu'il y a de son moment au nôtre! Cette différence peut se résumer en deux mots: Cour et Démocratie' (I cannot pronounce too often on both the subject of Vaugelas and the profound difference there is between his time and our own! This difference can be summarized in two words: Court and Democracy).[149] Difference and distance, and thus the irrecoverability of the past for the present, are once more in the frame. On the other hand, the frame is momentarily allowed to bend, but not to break. It is all very well for demotic to come knocking at the door of the Dictionary, demanding rights of lexical representation ('que de mots qui ne sont plus précisément des intrus et qui ont leur emploi légitime' (how many words there now are which are not exactly intruders and have their legitimate use)[150]), but 'legitimacy' is precisely the issue. Vaugelas's example should be borne in mind as not furnishing a recipe for radically democratizing or 'republicanizing' the language in the manner of Hugo's manifesto poem 'Réponse à un acte d'accusation'. Confronted with the changing face of the language, the duty of the Académie and its Dictionary is to temper this trend: 'Que l'Académie veuille y songer: la démocratie des mots, comme toute démocratie en France, aime assez à être conduite et dirigée' (It is to be hoped that the Academy will reflect on this: the democracy of words, like all democracy in France, likes to be guided and directed).[151]

We will see a lot more of Sainte-Beuve on the subject of culture, democracy, and the state.[152] But the ransacking of the seventeenth century for models that might apply to the organization of language and literature in the nineteenth century was to come out not just as a set of prescriptions for a moderating Académie française. It was ultimately to be underpinned by the extraordinary thought that the role of the Sun King might be reinvented in the figure of Louis-Napoleon. This was to take two forms, both articulated two years before 'De la tradition'. The first was the proposal for a professional literary corporation, to be directed not through the intermediary of state apparatuses, but directly through the person of the Emperor ('un intérêt direct, un bienfait direct, régulier, dont l'origine remonterait à l'empereur et ne remonterait qu'à lui' (a direct interest, a direct, steady benefit, whose origin runs back to the Emperor and only to him)).[153] The second was even more fantastical and bore on the question of literary practice itself (rather than its institutional embeddings), on the forms that literature might now take. This was formulated as the idea of a state literature.

[153] *NL* vi. 364, 394–5. [154] *NL* vi. 394. [155] *NL* vi. 396.
[156] See Ch. 8. [157] *Pr. L.* iii. 65.

Ce n'est pas un rêve que de croire qu'il serait utile de voir se produire quelquefois de beaux essais de ce que j'appelle une littérature d'État, c'est-à-dire une littérature affectionnée, qui ne soit pas servile, mais qui ose relever les vrais principes, honorer les hommes par leur côté principal et solide, rappeler derrière les jeux brillants et souvent trompeurs de la scène les mérites de ceux qui, à toutes les époques, ont servi le monde en le rendant habitable d'abord, en le conservant ensuite, en le replaçant, quand il veut se dissoudre, en des cadres fixes, et en luttant contre les immenses difficultés cachées. Et à quelle époque serait-il plus opportun de le faire qu'à celle où la notion et l'idée du souverain se personnifie d'elle-même, et où la nation, grâce à une impulsion incomparable, acquiert et retrouve la seule chose qui lui avait manqué depuis quarante ans, la grandeur?

It is no mere daydream to believe that it would useful to see the creation from time to time of some beautiful experiments in what I call a state literature, that is to say, a devoted literature, which would not be merely servile, but which dares to rebuild true principles, honour men for their main and solid achievements, remind us, behind the brilliant and often deceptive games of the social stage, of the merits of those who, in all periods, have served the world in first making it habitable, in then preserving it, in restoring it, when it proposes to dissolve, to fixed frames, and in struggling against immense hidden difficulties. And in which period would it be more opportune to do this than in that where the nation, thanks to an incomparable impetus, is acquiring and refinding the one thing that it has lacked for forty years, greatness?[154]

This, Sainte-Beuve tells us, is not a dream ('pas un rêve'), but it is of course exactly that, a dream of the seventeenth century from the point of view of the nineteenth century. Like most such dreams of cultural transplant, it deteriorates rapidly at the moment of contact with reality. The fantasized new 'state literature' is not to be 'servile', yet what could be more ingratiating than the reference to the 'sovereign', Louis-Napoleon, as the personification of a recovered national 'grandeur'?[155] There is also a fundamental ellipsis in the treatment of the seventeenth-century source itself. As Louis XIV's 'contrôleur-général' in the precincts of Parnassus, Boileau rarely confused service with servility. In this he differed from the functionary literati such as Desmarets and Perrault, who respectively placed themselves entirely at the disposal of the great administrative machines of Richelieu and Colbert. Desmarets under Richelieu

[158] *Pr.L.* iii. 58.

[159] In this it was a projected reprise of the uncle: 'Un homme puissant replaçait sur ses bases l'ordre social et politique. Toutes les fois qu'après un long bouleversement l'ordre politique se répare et reprend sa marche réguliére, l'ordre littéraire tend à se mettre en accord et à suivre de son mieux' (A powerful man put the social and political order back on secure foundations. Every time, after a long upheaval, the political order is repaired and resumes its steady march, the literary order tends to adjust harmoniously to this development and to follow it as best it can) (*CL* i. 374). As we shall see, the marriage of politics and culture around an idea of 'reparation' will be a constant of Sainte-Beuve's thinking in the 1850s and 1860s.

and Perrault under Colbert did not hesitate in subordinating literature and the arts to the celebration of royal power, whereas Boileau's conception of the relation between literature and the state affirmed the autonomy of the former and hence its non-reducibility to the terms of mere panegyric.[156] In places Sainte-Beuve distinguishes the two, recalling the alleged famous declaration of Louis XVI: 'Boileau ne put être Boileau que du jour où Louis XIV dit tout haut en plein Versailles: "M. Des Préaux s'y connaît en vers mieux que moi" ' (Boileau could be Boileau only from the day when Louis XIV said out loud at Versailles: 'M. Des Préaux is more of an expert on verse than I').[157] On the other hand, Sainte-Beuve betrays not the slightest concern over Perrault's role as servant of the state, indeed emphasizing it expressly in order to rescue Perrault from the image of the authority-challenging *enfant terrible*. For Perrault 'le but final auquel il fallait tout rapporter' (the ultimate goal to which all was related) was 'la gloire du roi. Chaque grande époque produit de ces esprits qui sont faits avant tout pour la servir. Tel est Charles Perrault par rapport au siècle de Louis-le-Grand' (the fame of the king. Every great period produces those minds made above all to serve. Such is Charles Perrault in relation to the age of Louis XIV).[158] In that version of Perrault, we see a contemporary agenda at work that has less to do with discriminating within seventeenth-century sources than with contesting the romantic cult of exile ('wandering') of Sainte-Beuve's own epoch. If Boileau sought to secure the autonomy of literature, he did not mean autonomy in the modern sense of the oppositional and the alienated. Boileau may have aligned literature and politics in a more intellectually fastidious manner by upholding the rights of literature, but so obsessively fixated is Sainte-Beuve on the alleged disorders of his own time that this fundamental distinction between Boileau and his adversaries seems scarcely to have caught his attention. It disappears entirely in the excited remarks about Richelieu's policy of annexing literature as an auxiliary of the state: Richelieu—we are told it was 'une idée bien française'—did not deceive himself ('il ne se trompait pas dans sa vue publique de la littérature' (he did not err in his public conception of literature)) in his belief that 'le génie des Lettres est l'ornement nécessaire et indirectement auxiliaire, la plus magnifique et la plus honorable décoration de l'État' (the genius of Letters is the necessary ornament and indirect auxiliary, the most splendid and honourable decoration

[160] On Boileau as critical of the subordination of literary culture to mere *raison d'État*, see Fumaroli, 'Les Abeilles et les araignées', 132 ff.

[161] *PC* iii. 427. We might also note here the relish with which Sainte-Beuve recounts Boileau's campaign to oust Chapelain from a position of influence on the formation of Colbert's policies (*CL* vi. 501–2). Elsewhere Sainte-Beuve described 'Chapelain surtout' as 'ce dictateur littéraire dans les premiers académicians' (Chapelain above all … this literary dictator amongst the first Academicians) (*NL* vi. 344).

[162] *CL* v. 260.

of the State).[159] Whether the inspiring example is Richelieu, Perrault, or Boileau, the desired outcome remains the same: the state in the service of literature and literature in the service of the state.[160]

The return in 'De la tradition' to the classical fold and the related embrace of the fatherland did not entail ratifying Nisard's immovable scepticism over the value of innovation (on that crucial point, Sainte-Beuve kept his distance to the end), but the cause of the new was increasingly subordinated to the stress on a disciplinary regime of preservation, regulation, and control. This was to pose intractable problems when it came to linking the fortunes of the national classic in the nineteenth century to the idea of a 'modern' classic, in conditions when, as Curtius puts it, 'Sainte-Beuve's *Temple du goût* was carried away by a century of iconoclasm'.[161] But examining these difficulties remains some way off (it is the subject of the penultimate chapter, where we shall capture them in the context of Sainte-Beuve's reflections on Chateaubriand). For now we must turn to that aspect of the 'tradition' in 'De la tradition' that I have so far left out, but to which a substantial portion of Sainte-Beuve's text was pointedly devoted. The latter's opening pages take us not to seventeenth-century France but to the legacy of ancient Greece and Rome (especially the latter). It cannot have been just a coincidence, moreover, that the source for the odd fantasia about the prospects for a contemporary state literature was the review of a book about the Roman Empire (Troplong's *De la chute de la république romaine*). For if *patrie* signified nation, it was also *patrimoine*, in the sense of the larger tradition from which the national literature was deemed to stem. In this regard, Sainte-Beuve's mentor was once again Boileau, at once a nationalist of sorts, but also an Ancient, and thus, unlike Perrault, someone for whom plotting the contours of the 'national' meant reaching back to the empire of Latinity and the prestige of Rome.

[163] *CL* xiv. 209, 199.

[164] Boileau in fact, in *Art poétique*, construed literature—or more broadly the 'arts of harmonious discourse'—as *foundational* of the state (see Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature*, 147). On the tension between political power and the newly emerging notion of the writer's 'autonomy', see Jouhaud, *Les Pouvoirs de la littérature*.

[165] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 396.

# 4

# Latinity and the Second Renaissance

## I

The strong—and, on occasion, even exclusive—association of the term 'classic' with the works of classical antiquity was particularly marked in the second half of the eighteenth century. Voltaire, we have seen, spoke of 'nos auteurs classiques' (meaning the great writers of the seventeenth century), but he did so only sporadically and apparently without real conviction. For the most part he was inclined to restrict the term to ancient texts; 'auteurs classiques' in the *Essai sur la poésie épique* signifies only the authors of antiquity.[1] The idea—as distinct from the term—had of course been there ever since the Renaissance, but the terminological history was to assume a life of its own, especially where the institutional transmission of the legacy of antiquity was concerned, and emerged most pressingly in the educational debates over the value of teaching Latin in the schools. During the Revolution, Latin was seen as an instrument for inculcating a love of republican virtue.[2] Under Napoleon, the introduction of 'modern' (that is, seventeenth-century) French classics into the curriculum was motivated by a new set of national–imperial requirements. But it was also accompanied by what Daniel Milo calls 'le retour du Latin'. The evocation of Latinity was one way of conferring the aura of the past on the dubious legitimacy of imperial modernity, and the study of Latin one way of cementing the equation of national classic with the (unofficial but powerfully operative) notion of a 'state classic'.[3]

By the time of the July Monarchy the terms have changed dramatically. In 1837 the mathematician and astronomer François Arago made a series of speeches in the Chamber of Deputies, arguing that the study of Latin was

[1] As Jean Hytier observes, 'Voltaire, it would seem, used the expression "classical authors" only for the great writers of Greco-Latin antiquity' ('The Classicism of the Classics', *Yale French Studies*, 38 (1967), 5).

[2] N. Loraux and P. Vidal-Nacquet, 'Formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise', in Robert Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on Western Thought: AD 1650–1870* (Cambridge, 1979), 184.

[3] Daniel Milo, 'Les Classiques scolaires', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt. 2, *La Nation* (Paris, 1986), iii. 529, 531.

a useless relic and an obstruction to the project of modernization, which was best secured by replacing the study of dead languages with that of living languages (above all French) and promoting the cause of the natural sciences. Lamartine replied by accepting the need for scientific education, but rejected Arago's outright technocratic position, claiming that, without a 'moral and literary' education in which the languages and literatures of antiquity would have a major role, the very idea of 'humanity' would perish.[4] In the aftermath of 1848 the issue was once again taken up. Frédéric Bastiat argued in 1850 that the study of Latin, by recalling the example of ancient Rome, encouraged the vices of idleness and hostility to work characteristic of a society based on slave labour. Bastiat, however, gave a strange spin to his case, by linking this devaluation of manual work to the monsters spawned by 1848, 'materialism' and 'socialism' (his book was titled *Baccalauréat et socialisme*); as Françoise Wacquet remarks, this was 'an unusual accusation'.[5] Meanwhile the 'modernizing' aspirations of Louis-Napoleon's regime sought to square the circle by means of an exceptionally ingenious argument. Certain members of the commission appointed in 1853 to investigate the future of teaching pleaded the case for the economic advantages of Latin: the study of Latin encouraged the specifically 'French' qualities of mind and imagination (measure, finish, and 'taste') that might prove helpful in fostering an economy based on the production of luxury goods, at a time when France was unable to rival the great industrial machines of Britain and the United States. Latin, in short, would help France compete on the uneven playing field of industrial modernization.[6]

It is easy to imagine this argument appealing to Sainte-Beuve, given his strange belief—or rather hope—that the Second Empire could simultaneously and coherently embrace modernization and reinvent something of the cultural world of Augustus. However, his own intervention in these debates—over the proposals of the minister of education, Fourtoul, for syllabus reform in the lycées—confined itself largely to the terms of the earlier exchanges between Arago and Lamartine. Arago makes a reappearance, in the familiar position of

[4] Françoise Wacquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign*, trans. John Howe (London, 2001), 191.

[5] Ibid. 193. But, however unusual, Bastiat was not alone in this view. In his 1851 pamphlet *Le Ver rongeur des sociétés modernes*, the ultramontanist abbé Gaume wrote: 'les doctrines subversives auxquelles on a donné le nom de *socialisme* ou de *communisme* sont le fruit de l'enseignement classique' (the subversive doctrines to which one has given the name *socialism* or *communism* are the fruit of a classical education) (quoted in Janine Rosalind Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851–1900* (Oxford, 1973), 76).

[6] Wacquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign*, 195. As early as 1814 Villemain spoke of 'ces études classiques qui conduisent à toutes les professions savantes de la société' (those classical studies that lead to all the learned professions of society) (quoted in Maurice Crubellier, 'L'Élargissement du public', in Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (eds.), *Histoire de l'édition française. Le Temps des éditeurs. Du romantisme à la Belle Epoque* (Paris, 1990, 27).

defender of the sciences and modern languages against the study of dead ones, with as opponent the arch-conservative Saint-Marc Girardin. Sainte-Beuve characteristically reached for the middle ground, but not without making a passionate plea for the sanctity of the classics (in this respect his heart is with Girardin: 'notre cœur à nous, qui sommes plutôt du vieux monde, était pour lui' (in our own heart, those of us who belong in the old world, we were with him)). The interesting feature of his case, however, is that he identifies the threat to the study of the classics as arising not so much from Arago's modernizing ideology (of which he in part approves), but from the fissures and perturbations of 1848: 'Une révolution politique survenant (en 1848), on avait pu craindre que l'enceinte classique du temple ne fût envahie et comme emportée d'assaut' (A revolution having intervened (in 1848), we were in a position to fear that the classical enclosure of the temple would be invaded and swept away by assault).[7] Thus once again the question of the classic and the question of revolution are joined, in a relation of mortal enmity. We shall have occasion to return to this relation again, and indeed to this particular passage. But, in respect of the specifically educational debate, we see that Sainte-Beuve has something in common with the bizarre Frédéric Bastiat (though the latter is mentioned nowhere in his writings), an anxiety about the role of the classics in a society that has recently undergone the experience of popular insurrection. Sainte-Beuve, of course, could not conceivably have drawn Bastiat's perversely bizarre conclusion; his was the exact opposite—namely, that the study of the classics has a reparative function, essential to the orderly running of a society previously shaken to its foundations.[8]

But we also see something else: running through all these debates, the dominant, and even sole, issue is the teaching of Latin; Greek scarcely figures. This was a barometer of priorities, and it raised a problem that lies at the heart of Sainte-Beuve's thinking. When Sainte-Beuve uses the term *classique* to refer to the works of antiquity, not only is it never exclusively tied to this reference, but, more importantly, it provokes another 'delicate' question: the relative value for French literary culture of Greece and Rome. The conventional view banished the issue of relativity in favour of a simple model of natural filiation: there is first Greece, then Rome, then the Graeco-Roman as a common *fons et origo* for the culture of Europe in general (strictly the Europe of the Romance languages) and France in particular. For those who come after, the

[7] *CL* xi. 276.

[8] See also Sainte-Beuve's remarks on Arnold and English education: 'On sait quelle forte éducation première reçurent de tout temps les hommes d'Etat de la Grande-Bretagne dans leurs collèges de Cambridge, d'Oxford ou d'Eton' (We know what an impressive primary education the statesmen of Great Britain always received in their colleges at Cambridge, Oxford, or Eton) (*PC* v. 354).

Graeco-Latin world forms a unified legacy. This is the view that Sainte-Beuve will state again and again, and with particular emphasis in the section of 'De la tradition' bracketed from the discussion of that text in the previous chapter. The opening pages of 'De la tradition' begin not in seventeenth-century France (the main sense of the term *tradition* Sainte-Beuve wanted to address), but with a long, semi-lyrical meditation on the roots of the tradition in antiquity:

Il y a une tradition: qui le nierait? Elle existe pour nous toute tracée, elle est visible comme une de ces avenues et de ces voies immenses, grandioses, qui traversaient autrefois l'Empire, et qui aboutissaient à la Ville par excellence. Descendants des Romains, ou du moins enfants d'adoption de la race latine, cette race initiée elle-même au culte du beau par les Grecs, nous avons à embrasser, à comprendre, à ne jamais déserter l'héritage de ces maîtres et de ces pères illustres.

There is a tradition: who would deny this? It exists for us fully marked, visible like one of those immense, grandiose avenues and ways that once upon a time traversed the Empire, and that led to the City par excellence. Descendants of the Romans or at least adoptive children of the Latin race, that race itself initiated into the cult of the beautiful by the Greeks, it falls to us to embrace, to understand, never to desert the heritage of those masters and those illustrious forebears.[9]

In this account, Greece is the fount—'cette première race hellénique si privilégiée entre toutes et uniquement douée' (that first Hellenic race, so privileged among all others and uniquely gifted)—and the bringer of culture to the martial order of early Rome.[10] It cannot therefore be a question of 'choosing', but when it comes to the direct line of descent from which France emerges, the stress falls squarely on Rome:

Il ne s'agit pas ici de distinguer entre les Grecs et les Latins; leur héritage pour nous et leurs bienfaits se confondent. Certes le *Graecia capta ferum* … est au fond de tout: c'est le point de départ. Mais la force romaine, le bras romain, la langue et la pratique romaines sont aussi partout: ça a été le grand instrument de propagation et de culture … les Athéniens n'ont su remplir qu'une moitié de son voeu, et cette œuvre rêvée—et mieux que rêvée, proposée par Périclès,—œuvre de constance, d'énergie durable et d'empire politique universel, ce sont les Romains qui se sont chargés de l'accomplir.

[9] *CL* xv. 357–8. See Ruth E. Mulhauser, *Sainte-Beuve and Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Cleveland, Oh., and London, 1969), 48.

[10] 'N'oublions jamais que Rome était déjà arrivée, par son énergie et son habileté, au pouvoir politique le plus étendu et à la maturité d'un grand Etat après la seconde guerre punique, sans posséder encore rien qui ressemblât à une littérature proprement digne de ce nom; il lui fallut conquérir la Grèce pour être prise, en la personne de ses généraux et de ces chefs illustres, pour être touchée de ce beau feu qui devait doubler et perpétuer sa gloire' (Let us never forget that Rome, by its energy and skill, had already by the end of the second Punic War attained the most widespread political power and the maturity of a great State without yet possessing anything resembling a literature worthy of the name; the conquest of Greece was necessary for that, in the person of its generals and illustrious leaders, to be seized, to be touched, by this beautiful flame which was to double and perpetuate its glory) (*CL* xv. 359).

It is not here a question of distinguishing between the Greeks and the Latins; the legacy and benefits they have transmitted to us blend into one. To be sure, the *Graecia capta ferum* … lies at the bottom of everything: it is the point of departure. But the strength of the Romans, the Roman arm, the language and practices of Rome are also everywhere to be felt … the Athenians could fulfil but a half of its promise, and that dreamt-of work—more than dreamt-of, proposed by Pericles—a work of constancy, lasting energy, and universal political empire, was the work the Romans took upon themselves to accomplish.[11]

The preference declared, when pushed, for Rome is part of a more general argument about Latinity as the historical and cultural space (the 'tradition' in its broadest sense) to which France inseparably belongs. The point is no mere analytical one; whenever it is a question of France, Rome, and the empire of Latinity, Beuvian prose shows an instant tendency to move from the soberly matter-of-fact into the register of the grandly rotund. Consider, for example, the rising crescendo in the relatively prosaic business of sparring decorously with Arago over the mid-nineteenth-century school syllabus, when it comes to contextualizing this somewhat parochial debate in a longer-haul cultural history; it is now a matter of 'cette France où le génie littéraire a sa patrie, où la tradition du talent a ses autels, où le sentiment de la beauté latine et de la grandeur romaine a passé si profondément dans notre veine nationale et dans nos propres origines' (that France in which literary genius has its fatherland, where the tradition of talents has its altars, where the feeling for Latin beauty and Roman grandeur has passed so deeply into the veins of the nation and into our own origins).[12] But even this appears relatively restrained when set alongside the rolling periods penned a year earlier in the *Étude sur Virgile* (of which more in the next chapter):

L'arbre est enfin venu, et il a poussé tous ses rameaux avec les fruits que nous admirons et qu'il nous a été plus aisé de tout temps d'aller cueillir à Rome que partout ailleurs, nous autres Gaulois, à qui il a été donné de bonne heure de savoir le chemin du Capitole … de là aussi on redescend tout directement vers nous autres modernes par

[11] *CL* xv. 362–4.

[12] *CL* xi. 278. See also the view in 'De la Médée d'Apollonius' ('l'antiquité latine, plus rapprochee de nous que la grecque, nous est dès longtemps plus familière' (Latin antiquity, closer to us than the Greek version, has long been the more familiar to us) (*PC* v. 359)), and in the articles on Viollet-le-Duc ('En France, quoiqu'il y ait dans notre génie, dans notre tour naturel d'esprit et de langage … quelque chose qui nous rapproche davantage des Grecs, nous tenons des Romains par une filiation presque immédiate; nous y tenons aussi par réflexion, par habitude et routine; nous empruntons d'eux volontiers nos formules en tout; dans nos jugements et dans nos raisonnements sur l'art, nous sommes latinisés' (In France, although there is in our genius, in our natural dispositions of mind and language … something which brings us closer to the Greeks, we are tied to the Romans by an almost automatic filiation; we are also bound to them more consciously, in our habits and routines; we willingly borrow from them our formulae for everything; in our judgements and arguments about literature, we are Latinized) (*NL* vii. 164)).

des chemins tout tracés, et l'on y est ramené (pour continuer l'image) par de larges voies romaines. De Virgile, d'Horace, d'Ovide, de Lucain jusqu'à nous la pente est unie, la perspective est droite et ininterrompue; rien ne nous en sépare.

The tree finally appeared, and grew all its branches bearing the fruits that we admire and which, for us, have always been easier to pluck in Rome than anywhere else, we Gauls to whom was given early knowledge of the road to the Capitol … from there also one descends again to us other moderns along well-marked tracks, and one is led there (to continue with the image) along wide Roman ways. From Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan all the way to us the slope is even, the perspective is true and unbroken; nothing separates us from it.[13]

As Sainte-Beuve claims in 'De la tradition', the intimate relation binding France to Rome shows itself at all levels of the historical and social life of the nation, but pre-eminently through its language. For various reasons, Sainte-Beuve's most detailed account of the origins of French we must keep for Chapter 6. In the meantime, we might usefully turn to the late articles on Du Bellay (their lateness perhaps an index of their representing his considered and settled opinion on the matter). They begin interestingly with the *Défense et illustration de la langue française* ('ce petit livre représente un moment de la langue' (this little book represents a moment of the language)), a worthy companion to Fénelon's famous *Lettre à l'Académie française* and Rivarol's *Universalité de la langue française*,[14] and do so precisely in terms of the question of the classic, on a double front: the 'classic' as understood by Du Bellay and Du Bellay's work as itself an example of the classic:

Du Bellay, dans son moment, est un classique dans toute la force du terme, un classique qui veut qu'on invente à demi, qu'on transplante, qu'on greffe et qu'on perfectionne à la française … Ce que c'était qu'être classique, au sens où l'avait conçu Du Bellay, et comme on l'a été en France jusqu'au temps de notre jeunesse, nous le savons tous, nous qui y avons passé et qui en avons été témoins.

Du Bellay, in his own moment, is a classic in the full sense of the term, a classic which holds that we half-invent, that we transplant, that we graft and that we perfect in the French manner … What it was to be a classic, in the sense conceived by Du Bellay, and how it has been in France up until the time of our own youth, we all know full well, and have borne witness to it.[15]

Du Bellay's *Défense et illustration de la langue française* both argues for and itself instantiates a model of the classic based on a principle of creative transformation, in this case the absorption by French of Latin language and culture. Du Bellay's great mistake, however, was to have confused transformation (and thus filiation) with autonomy: 'il va donc plaider pour la

[13] *Étude sur Virgile* (Paris, 1857), 24. [14] *NL* xiii. 281–2. [15] *NL* xiii. 284, 295–6.

suffisance du français contre ceux qui la nient … il veut la renaissance, toute la renaissance, mais il se sépare de ceux qui la voient sous forme de latinité, et il prétend émanciper hautement notre idiome vulgaire et lui donner droit de cité à son tour' (he will therefore make the case for the self-sufficiency of French against those who deny it … he wants a renaissance, a whole renaissance, but he sets himself apart from those who see this arising in a Latin form, and claims openly to emancipate our vernacular idiom and grant it legitimate rights by its own light).[16] While at his best Du Bellay freely acknowledges the link with Latin and Latinity,[17] his proto-nationalist agendas force him into a separatist stance whereby the Latin empire and the newly national language are positioned as rivals, and accordingly into a historical linguistics that Sainte-Beuve sees as profoundly flawed. In chapter 2 of the *Défense* ('Que la langue francoyse ne doit pas ester nommée barbare'), Du Bellay develops the theme of the autonomous potential of French by setting the history of French within the tradition (established by Lemaire de Belges and continued in the work of Pasquier[18]) of taking national pride in French because of its alleged Gaulish origins. The claim rests on a polemical opposition of Gaulish to Latin (in order to refute the imputation of 'barbarian'), and it is exactly here that Sainte-Beuve parts company with Du Bellay. He acknowledges that Du Bellay did not have the concepts of nineteenth-century 'evolutionary' models of language development, but the repudiation of the substantive claim is categorical: the contamination of Du Bellay's linguistics by ideology blinded him to the hybrid origins of French as Gallo-Roman: 'Il est faible sur les origines de la langue … et sur les origines de notre langue en particulier. Il cherche à venger les Gaulois du reproche d'avoir été des barbares; il n'insiste nullement sur le caractère gallo-romain de notre langue, et sur une filiation qui paraît lui avoir échappé' (He is weak on the origins of language … and on the origins of our own language in particular. He seeks to avenge the Gauls for the reproach of having been barbarians; he does not dwell at all on the Gallo-Roman character of our language, and on a filiation which seems to have eluded him).[19]

Du Bellay opened, in purely theoretical and polemical terms, a false trail. It was to be decisively reoriented by the stylistic self-consciousness of the next century; during the *grand siècle*, the filiation of French with Latin, France with Rome, is not merely recovered as an abstract principle but is, so to speak, relived or reenacted in an actual practice of writing. Boileau revered the Greeks, but in the sinews and fibre of his writing he both reveals, and effectively declares, himself to be 'bien plus latin que grec' (far

[16] *NL* xiii. 302. [17] *NL* xiii. 303.
[18] For Sainte-Beuve on Pasquier, Latin, and French, see *CL* iii. 253. [19] *NL* xiii. 285.

more Latin than Greek).[20] The same claim is made, at greater length, about Bossuet's language

> Il savait le grec; mais ce qu'il savait à fond, admirablement, ce qu'il savait comme une langue naturelle, c'était le latin … C'est de cette connaissance approfondie du latin et de l'usage excellent qu'il en sut faire que découle chez Bossuet ce français neuf, plein, substantiel, dans le sens de la racine, et original … Ce *latinisme* intime et si sensible de Bossuet dans sa parole française me paraît plus qu'un accident, qu'un trait curieux à noter; c'est fondamental chez lui, c'est un caractère constant.
>
> He knew Greek; but what he knew thoroughly, admirably, what he knew as if it were a native tongue, was Latin … It was from this thorough knowledge of Latin and from the excellent uses he knew how to make of this that in Bossuet's writings there flows that new form of French, full, substantial in the root sense of the term, and original … The intimate and highly sensitive Latin inflection of Bossuet's French strikes me as more than simply accidental, a merely curious feature to be noted; it is fundamental to his being, a constant feature.[21]

Although Sainte-Beuve detested being faced with choices of this kind (and the choice between Greece and Rome more than most), he goes with the historical grain of his own culture in leaning towards Rome. Yet 'Rome' in nineteenth-century thought was a complex and fluctuating reference. In political discourse, it was caught up in a shifting play of interpretations and allegiances, broadly in conjunction with the changing and competing values attached to two other ancient cities, Sparta and Athens. Whereas in the eighteenth century the early Roman republic had joined with an image of Sparta to promote a model of political virtue (Rousseau and Mably), in the nineteenth century Sparta was annexed by the reactionaries such as Nisard to justify an altogether different conception of 'discipline' and public spiritedness. Athens, in the meantime, oscillated between condemnation by Condorcet and Volney as a society based on slavery and its glorification by Cornelius de Pauw as the city of liberty and prosperity, a view also reinforced, though in more frivolously superficial terms, by the abbé Barthélemy's *Le Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (Barthélemy's Athens was but a transparent version of late-eighteenth-century Paris). But the uses of Athens for the legitimation of modern commercial society came back into force during the nineteenth century. Constant was tempted by it, though held back on the grounds previously given by Condorcet, Volney, and others. By the time of the Second Empire, however, it acquired a new lease of life, most notably in the *Histoire grecque* of Victor Duruy, who was also to serve as Ministre de l'Instruction publique under Louis-Napoleon from 1863 to

[20] *CL* vii. 216. [21] *NL* ii. 347–9.

1869.[22] Sainte-Beuve criticized Barthélemy for his prettifying representations, but, as a warm supporter of both Louis-Napoleon's administration and his programme of economic modernization, he might have found Duruy's views congenial. On the other hand, most of this would have passed him by. For what, in these various appropriations of antiquity, was missing from the trio of republican Rome, militaristic Sparta, and commercial Athens is the only instance from antiquity that inspired what political imagination Sainte-Beuve possessed: imperial Rome. The latter had, of course, figured previously in the iconography of imperial power under Napoleon and was to return with a vengeance during the Second Empire, most notably in the hands of Sainte-Beuve himself.

## II

We shall see more of this later, in a series of bleakly grotesque parallels between past and present. But the area in which divisions of opinion and loyalty over the relative places of Greece and Rome pressed more immediately on Sainte-Beuve's literary ideas was in the sphere of cultural thought, including the very definition of what it meant to have a 'culture' at all. That the relevant scenario became one in which it was even imaginable to pose Greece and Rome as a choice was almost entirely due to the great Indic awakening in Europe, beginning with the Persian and Sanskrit discoveries of Anquetil-Duperron and Sir William Jones in the eighteenth century and then moving decisively centre-stage in the nineteenth century with the explosion in Indo-European comparative philology (or, as it was initially and revealingly baptized by August Wilhelm Schlegel, 'Indo-Germanic'[23]). As is well known, the story of both the development and the spread of comparative philology cannot be confined to the purely internal history of its technical advances as a discipline. What made (and still makes) it a phenomenon of more general note in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century lies in its impact on cognate areas of enquiry—comparative religion and mythology, anthropology, historiography, literary history, and literary theory—in ways that at once reflected and nourished a climate of opinion that was to become progressively laden with all manner of disturbing claims.

[22] For a remarkable account of this history, see Loraux and Vidal-Nacquet, 'La Formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise', 171–222.

[23] Anna Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics* (History of Linguistics, ed. Giulio Lepschy, 4; London, 1998), 81.

In his 1891 essay 'Le Langage et les nationalités', the great French linguist Michel Bréal cast his mind back over a hundred years to Rivarol's famous address to the Academy of Berlin in 1783: 'Quand Rivarol, en 1783, adressait à l'Académie de Berlin son discours sur l'universalité de la langue française, nul ne prévoyait, ni à Berlin, ni à Paris, l'importance politique qui serait un jour attribuée à la différence des idiomes' (When Rivarol in 1783 addressed the Academy of Berlin on the universality of the French language, no one either in Berlin or in Paris foresaw the political importance that would one day be attached to linguistic differences), in the sense of 'une marque de fabrique imposée par la nature aux différents groupes ethniques' (a sort of trademark imposed by nature on different ethnic groups).[24] It took only just over two decades for the unforeseeable to become fact. In 1808, also in Berlin (now under Napoleonic occupation), Fichte gave his *Fourth Discourse to the German Nation*, in which he proclaimed French, along with all the other Romance languages, to be a dead language in opposition to the 'living' organism that was German: 'One does not compare what is dead to what is living … Any comparison of the Germanic languages with the neo-Latin languages is thus useless.'[25] Bréal (of whom we shall see more shortly), while having no brief for Rivarol's universalism and acknowledging that the change of temper had brought immense gains for the new (historical) science of language, was genuinely appalled at the 'vulgar' uses to which these developments were to be put: ' "De toutes les façons vulgaires de se dispenser de l'étude des influences sociales et morales sur l'âme humaine," dit quelque part Stuart Mill, "la plus vulgaire est d'attribuer les différences de caractère et de conduite à des différences naturelles indestructibles" ' ('Of all the vulgar means of avoiding the study of social and moral influences on the human soul', John Stuart Mill says somewhere, 'the most vulgar is that of attributing differences of character and behaviour to indestructible natural differences').[26] Linguistic difference, otherwise the proper object of historical and comparative enquiry, had been ontologized as natural difference, and with that move a poison had been released into the atmosphere:

Ce qui se trouvait au fond de toutes ces spéculations, c'était le dédain et le mépris de la raison. Un certain orgueil de caste s'y mêlait aussi: l'idée de races privilégiées,

[24] Michel Bréal, 'Le Langage et les nationalités', *Revue des deux mondes*, 6 (1891), 616, 630 (English trans. George Wolf).

[25] Quoted in Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 186. Fichte's thinking was, however, complex, in certain key respects closer to Jacobin republicanism than to Schlegel's Catholic nationalism, while, on the other hand, being caught up in the swell of the new pan-Germanist wave (see Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London, 1995), 257–63).

[26] Bréal, 'Le Langage et les nationalités', 621.

parmi lesquelles on n'oublait pas de se placer, ne pouvait déplaire. Ce côté personnel se montre dans l'expression *indo-germanique*, créée pour désigner l'une des grandes familles d'idiomes.

At the bottom of these speculations lurked a fundamental disdain for reason. A certain caste pride was mixed in: the notion of privileged races, including of course one's own, was not to be shunned. This personal side is revealed in the expression *Indo-Germanic*, coined in order to designate one of the great language families.[27]

For us the interest of these developments lies in their bearing, whether overt or implicit, on Sainte-Beuve's's literary thinking. The starting point is Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, which appeared in 1808 and was to set many of the terms for what was to follow. As Raymond Schwab's monumental study shows, the publication of *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* was a momentous cultural event, with repercussions nearly everywhere in the human sciences, literature, and, more diffusely, the public terms of social and historical self-understanding. And, however obliquely or indirectly, this 'second Renaissance' ('one of the world's great agitations' is how Schwab puts it on the opening page of *The Oriental Renaissance*[28]) could not but influence ways of thinking about the question of the classic. From the point of view of Sainte-Beuve's concerns, its most important feature was the threat it posed to the bulwark of what Edward Said (in his preface to the English translation of Schwab's book) called 'Europe's self-confirming cultural centrality'.[29] Amongst other things, 'Europe' here meant pre-eminently France as both the defender and imperious exporter of an essentially Latinate model of the neoclassical legacy, backed by claims for the 'universal' status of French as the language of either the polite culture of Louis XIV's court or the rational world republic to come (the 'second Renaissance … displaced the centuries of Augustus and Louis XIV'[30]). Quinet's punctual marking of the event (which he himself called 'la Renaissance orientale', thus giving to Schwab the title of his own book) involved the claim that 'une antiquité plus profonde, plus philosophique, plus poétique tout ensemble que celle de la Grèce et de Rome, surgissait du fond de l'Asie' (an antiquity more profound, more philosophical and more poetical than that of Greece and Rome was emerging from the depths of Asia).[31] Schlegel himself put it more crisply, in a letter to Ludwig Tieck: 'Everything, everything without exception, comes from India.'[32]

[27] Ibid. 619. [28] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 11.
[29] Edward Said, 'Foreword', in Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance,* p. xviii. [30] Ibid., p. ix.
[31] Edgar Quinet, *Le Génie des religions* (Paris, 1857), 54.
[32] Quoted in Sebastiano Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', in Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Amsterdam Classics in Linguistics 1800–1925, ed. E. F. K. Koerner, vol. 1; 1977), p. xxix.

Although Schlegel's essay was to prove widely influential, it was not especially significant for the development of a scientifically based discipline of comparative philology. Compared with those of Jones, Rask, and Bopp, Schlegel's linguistic discoveries were few and his metaphysical speculations abundant. Thus, while it would be too simple to reduce Schlegel's philological work to being merely the symptoms of extra-philological commitments and enthusiasms, there can be no doubt, as Sebastiano Timpanaro has so persuasively shown, that Schlegel's whole project was fuelled by a passionate (and seriously wrong-headed) *parti pris*. Schlegel famously—or notoriously—staked a very large bet on the pristine and 'revelatory' character of classical Sanskrit. The argument he built on this primal enthusiasm can be schematically resumed by way of four general moves. The first was analytical: the distinction between the so-called inflectional languages (the Indo-European family, presided over by the benign creative genius of Sanskrit) and the so-called agglutinative languages (Chinese, the Amerindian languages and—for various reasons—above all the Semitic languages). At the heart of the inflectional family lay the idea of the 'root', immediately clothed in an array of biologico-organic metaphors whereby the morphological root was granted a 'miraculous germinal power', in marked contrast to the allegedly 'inorganic' character of, say, Semitic, whose morphological structures are governed by the purely mechanical adding-on of affixes to the root.

The organic/inorganic distinction was designed to place a barrier of impenetrable separation between the different families of the world's languages, and in particular to ensure the pristine autonomy of the Indo-European family. This explained Schlegel's second move, this time historical in nature. The eighteenth-century debate over the origins of language tended to fade away in the nineteenth century, as a model of scientific investigation increasingly replaced what was, by its very nature, a speculative philosophical one; although Renan had kept the debate alive with his 1848 *De l'origine du langage*, the Société Linguistique de Paris formally banned all such discussions in 1866, officially because it deemed them to be fruitlessly distracting, but also from an awareness of their potentially dangerous political implications.[33] Schlegel himself appeared to agree, but his formulation took an ambiguous form: 'The hypotheses about the origin of language would all disintegrate or at least take a completely different form, if, instead of being left to poetic fancy, they were based on historical research.'[34] It is the qualification 'at least take a different form' that gives the hostages to fortune, effectively smuggling the question through the back door at the moment it is notionally consigned to oblivion ('disintegration').

[33] Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 70.

[34] Quoted in ibid. 70.

The eighteenth-century context for the debate was that of the competing claims of monogenesis (the theory of the divine origins of language, normally specified by way of Hebrew as the 'first' language given to Adam in the Garden of Eden) and polygenesis (embraced by rationalists anxious to shake off the grip of religion and affirm the uniquely human origins of language). Schlegel was a fierce opponent of the doctrine of monogenesis. But, if he espoused the counter-theory of the polygenetic descent of the languages of mankind, this had nothing in common with the secular free thinkers of the Enlightenment (who, subject to certain prejudices, sought to acknowledge both the diversity and equality of human tongues). The value of the polygenetic explanation to Schlegel lay in the extent to which it helped him to secure the absolute and unconditional separation of the language families (and crucially Indo-Germanic) from one another. Polygenesis supplied the intellectual pedigree for a doctrine of linguistic apartheid. The fear was therefore of 'contamination' and the corresponding fantasy that of 'purity'. But by 'purity' Schlegel understood purity of origin. The great wall of Inflection was not just a synchronic barrier; it also possessed a diachronic dimension leading back to earliest times. Thus it was that an ersatz version of the monogenetic hypothesis crept back in, though now confined to (because designed to protect) the Indo-European family. In the beginning was Sanskrit and, when that did not seem to work very plausibly, it became proto-Sanskrit. Either Sanskrit was the original mother language of the Aryan group or, if not (since even classical Sanskrit showed signs of decay from 'perfection'), then Sanskrit was the first daughter of a type of proto-Sanskrit that was then posited as the true self-mothering language, appearing in the world as fully formed and without blemish. There was indeed an *Ursprache* and it was perfect; if it was not demonstrably the gift of God, it possessed something of the aura of the 'divine'.[35]

The vegetal metaphor of the root, coupled with both the claustral taxonomy it underpinned and the origins fable it sponsored, made possible the third and fourth moves, which were to prove the most controversial of all. The first was to order linguistic differences hierarchically within an evaluative scheme, such that the organic languages, suffused with the vitality of 'life', were deemed not only different from but superior to the inorganic ones; agglutinative languages belonged in the degraded realm of the 'animal', while inflectional ones were truly 'spiritual'. The second—and even more alarming—move was to naturalize the metaphors (what Bréal was later to call the view of language

[35] For details, see Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', pp. xx–xxii. Said also comments on the paradox of reinventing a modified monogeneis at the very moment it is dismissed: 'But some writers shrewdly commented on how it was that Sanskrit and things Indian in general had simply taken the place of Hebrew and the Edenic fallacy' (*Orientalism* (New York, 1979), 137).

as a fourth kingdom of nature) by taking the 'soil' in which the root grew quite literally; that is, the extension of 'roots' to the territorial spaces of a 'people', a 'nation', or a 'race', thus binding the linguistic and the ethnographic in one fateful knot.[36] The 'purer' the language, the purer the tribe. This was further linked to a story of decay and fall: in the beginning was Sanskrit (or proto-Sanskrit), and Sanskrit was the purest of them all. The aboriginal language belonged to the aboriginal community, home to the higher 'wisdom'. It was then, of course, but a step, but one with grave consequences, to align this story with the dream of a resurrection, according to which the original forms of Indo-European and the purity of the aboriginal tribe were held to have a special affinity with both the German language and the German *Volk*; in Martin Thom's words, it unleashed 'the demons of teleological autochthony' serving 'the mission of an elect nation'.[37]

This is a schematic representation, and later Schlegel himself was to renounce or at least weaken and equivocate some of these noxious imaginings. Moreover, his views were not uniformly shared by his contemporaries and immediate successors in the field of comparative philology. Jakob Grimm and later August Schleicher were keen organicists,[38] with Grimm an ardent proselytizer for the cause of inflectional superiority and the identification of language with the 'spirit' of the *Volk* (his greatest claim to fame, the formulation of the German *Lautverschiebung*, was overlaid with a thick crust of patriotism, the shift from 'soft' consonants to 'hard' being a reflection of the martial virtues of the Teutonic warrior tribes in their struggle against the Romans).[39] The organicist analogy also touched the work of both Wilhelm Humboldt and Franz Bopp, though the former used it without, however, naturalizing the trope as if it designated an actual scientific law.[40] They also rejected the nationalist colonizing of the field under the heading 'Indo-Germanic' (preferring the more ecumenical 'Indo-European').[41] Above all, both resisted what, in connection with one of Schlegel's English disciples (Freeman), John

[36] As Timpanaro sharply observes, Schlegel's theory was 'a construct that would exercise a heavy influence on a great part of nineteenth-century ethnography which, even when it repudiated its Romantic and mystical spirit, would retain and develop its budding colonialist and racist inclinations' ('Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', p. xxxviii). It is the thinking that underlies the ideology that Tom Nairn has described as 'tongue-essentialism' ('A Myriad Byzantiums', *New Left Review* (Sept.–Oct. 2003), 119).

[37] Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 189, 194.

[38] See Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 138–9, 167 ff.

[39] For a trenchant critique of the ideological baggage in Grimm's theory of the *Lautverschiebung*, see Michel Bréal, 'La Loi de Grimm', *Revue de Paris*, 14/6 (1907), 52–64.

[40] Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 88.

[41] In the preface to the second edition of his *Comparative Grammar*, Bopp explicitly used 'Indo-European' while attacking the label 'Indo-Germananic'.

Burrow has pithily described as the 'moralizing' of 'grammatical forms'.[42] On the centrepiece of Schlegel's system, Humboldt wrote categorically: 'I can say with certainty that it is not possible to divide languages into agglutinative and inflected languages.'[43] Bopp went even further: not only did he stand aloof from the pressing of linguistic science into the service of ethno-political phantasms; he also delivered a body blow to Schlegel's version of apartheid by the simple expedient of demonstrating that, on its own terms, the system imploded from within. Schlegel took great pains not to restrict the 'germinal' power of the root solely to vocalic alternations inside the root, but also included in the description suffixes and desinences (not to have included them would have meant having to penalize his beloved Sanskrit, in which ending formations were prominent). Bopp pointed out that, on these criteria, the Semitic languages—the very language group that, for largely non-linguistic reasons, Schlegel had excluded from the inflectional family—displayed comparable properties.[44]

In fact, Schlegel's real influence was felt outside the field of comparative philology as such, especially in comparative religion and mythology, as well as their younger relative, the emerging discipline of ethnography. Creuzer's investigations into the ancient religions, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, was a key text (published in 1810, and in many ways an echo of Görres's earlier *Mythengeschichte der Asiatischen Welt* (1801)).[45] Creuzer's mythography belongs in the story by virtue of two negative commitments. First there was the standard hostility to Semitic. In *Symbolik und Mythologie* he sought to locate the origins of monotheism in Persia and thus to supply an Aryanist lineage for the origins of Christianity that would thereby de-link it from a Judaic antecedent (the notion was that Persia was the place of origin for both Christianity and Judaism). This was also one of Schlegel's concerns at the time he was working on Iranian material. Secondly, Creuzer manifested an equally rabid hostility to Latinity and the culture of the derived Romance languages. In the light of recent political events, but also by virtue of the long hegemony of the French neoclassical canon, the urgent imperative was to mobilize the Indic revolution in order to drive a wedge into the bonded Graeco-Roman heritage. Greece was to be on the side of Germany, in an alliance taking in Persian and Sanskrit, while the Latin-based

[42] J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), 191.

[43] Quoted in Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 112.

[44] See ibid. 80–2 and Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', pp. xix, xxvi.

[45] Görres was later described as the 'fourth wing' of the Holy Alliance and fetchingly represented his views on the question of Alsace by declaring 'Burn Strasbourg' (quoted in Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 285).

languages were to be relegated to the position of poor relations within the Indo-European family.

In the first flush of his love affair with Sanskrit, Friedrich Schlegel was somewhat contemptuous of neo-Hellenism ('the excessively one-sided and simplistic concern with the Greeks'[46]). It is true that, as Schwab notes, in a first phase 'the prestige of Greece … fell behind that of Asia … "Primitive Greece" arrived last, after the importance of the Hindu sphere had already diminished'.[47] But already in Schlegel's time the real target was Latinity and its linguistic offspring (artists, proclaimed Schlegel, should go to India not Rome). Greece and Greek were not so much disparaged as annexed, via Sanskrit and Persian, to a special relation with German (Schlegel 'proclaimed the existence of a privileged link between Germans and Greeks').[48] There was ample eighteenth-century precedent for this move against the Latin cultures. Leibniz (in his treatise on the origins of language (1710)), remarked that 'Teutonic' was the language 'closest to God', and, although his ostensible purpose was to oust Hebrew, he probably also had French in his sights.[49] In 1747 the abbé Girard (he gets a brief mention from Sainte-Beuve as 'l'abbé Girard, le grammarien'[50]) had classified languages into three kinds: 'analogues', 'transpositives', and 'mixtes'.[51] The details do not matter but for their illustration of a more general distinction between inflected languages with relatively free word order and those, of which French was an example, that were less inflected and hence more syntactically rigid. This property of modern French was to be variously interpreted. Where the eighteenth-century champions of French word order had vaunted it as mirroring the structure of rational thought, those of more Gallophobic dispositions saw this as symptomatic of a loss of vigour and an inflectionally etiolated French as obliged to imprison itself within a fixed syntax that constrained the creative freedom of the speaker.[52] Herder was to reason along similar lines and, while elsewhere eloquently enlightened in his defence of cosmopolitan values and the 'natural' equality of languages and cultures, at his most thuggish he linked Greek and German as authentically 'original' languages, vastly superior to the derived Romance languages.[53] But it was in the nineteenth century, under the influence of Schlegel and Creuzer, that the stage was set for uniting India, Greece, and Germany as the 'philosophical'

[46] Quoted in Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 69.

[47] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 120.

[48] Bolgar, 'Introduction', in Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences*, 12. In fact, the association of Greek with German goes back to the Lutheran Reformation.

[49] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 170.

[50] *CL* viii. 9.

[51] Abbé Girard, *Les Vrais Principes de la langue française ou La Parole réduite en méthode conformément aux Lois d'Usage* (Paris, 1747; repr. Geneva, 1982), i. 27 ff.

[52] See Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 71–2.

[53] Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', p. xxxiii.

nations, where 'philosophical' no longer meant rational enquiry in the manner of the Enlightenment, but the mystical pantheism of 'external revelations', the nation as material embodiment of living 'spirit'.[54] It was in this context that Fichte declared the 'neo-Latin' languages to be 'dead', that Klaproth called Germany 'Indo-Germanic', and that August Schlegel, most notably in his lectures on Greek tragedy, launched the long anti-French campaign that Sainte-Beuve was to find so offensive.[55]

## III

The 'anti-Latin frenzy'[56] was of course unlikely to commend itself with quite the same degree of passion in the country of Latinity par excellence. Where comparative philology was concerned, France was essentially an importing nation, on the receiving end of ideas travelling across the Rhine, which took up abode in Paris in modified, tempered, and—at times—contested form. Although the Collège de France had a chair of Sanskrit by 1814 (occupied by Antoine-Leonard de Chézy, who was succeeded by Burnouf in 1832), it was not until the late 1860s, with the creation of the École d'Anthropologie (1867), the Société Linguistique de Paris (1866), and the École Pratique des Hautes Études (1868), that comparative philology was consolidated as a fully professional discipline.[57] On the other hand, many of the founding figures from Germany came to Paris to study Sanskrit and related subjects. For various historical and political reasons (mainly the insistence, after the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna, that intellectual and academic pursuits be detached from openly political discussion), Paris became a centre of research and debate relatively unencumbered, at least in the earlier part of the century, by the mystico-nationalist fervours of Germany.[58]

[54] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 165.

[55] Timpanaro, however, also notes A. W. Schlegel's rejection of Klopstock's 'linguistic nationalism' ('Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', p. xxxi). The intellectual climax of this long campaign is to be found in Nietzsche: 'at long last the German nation may stand before the other nations, free of the leading strings of Romance culture—provided that it continues to be able to learn from that nation from whom to learn at all is a high and rare thing, the Greeks' (*The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York, 1956), 121).

[56] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 273.

[57] Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 9.

[58] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has argued that the project of a 'national philology' linked to national identity did not take off in France in the same way as in Germany because of its legacy of what he calls *science de l'homme*, anchored in Enlightenment values of universalism and cosmopolitanism (' "Un Souffle d'Allemagne ayant passé": Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris and the Genesis of National Philologies', *Romance Philology*, 40/1 (1986), 13).

Nevertheless the intellectual starting point for comparative philology was of German provenance, and it left its mark in ways that were not exclusively scientific. From the strictly scholarly point of view, the field was initially dominated by the towering figure of Eugène Burnouf, the quintessential scholar-saint, consuming his health and life in the service of pure erudition. Burnouf was primarily a 'philologist', in the older sense of philology as the study of texts, who deployed the new tools of comparative grammar for the interpretation of literary and religious sources in the Sanskrit and Iranian corpuses: he translated the *Bhagavata Purana*; his study of Pali opened avenues to the understanding of Buddhism; his work on the *Avesta* corrected Anquetil-Duperron's work by showing it as contemporary with Vedic Sanskrit, both therefore hailing from a common source. In all this he was, as James Darmesteter (himself no friend of the mystics) said later in the century, animated solely by the spirit of objective enquiry, and it is presumably through no fault of his own that one of his later fans was none other than Richard Wagner (who for a while considered basing an opera on his readings of Burnouf).[59]

It was, however, but a matter of time before the academic subject of comparative philology produced its divisions and camps. The latter had institutional sites: at the École d'Anthropologie, Chavée, Hovelacque, and Adam were of the 'organicist' persuasion, influenced by Schleicher's biologism, itself bearing strong traces of the Schlegelian legacy. In the other camp, based respectively at the Société Linguistique de Paris and the École Pratique des Hautes Études, were Bréal and, though more equivocally, Gaston Paris (since he was primarily a medievalist, we shall consider Gaston Paris in the next chapter). Bréal is one the unsung heroes of nineteenth-century French linguistics (he appears nowhere in Said and only in passing in Schwab).[60] Bréal was born in Germany of French Jewish parents, the family emigrating to France after his father's death in 1837, initially to Alsace (where Bréal studied in Wissembourg and Metz) and then to Paris, where he enrolled at the École Normale Supérieure in 1852. Appointed to the post of *chargé de cours* at the Collège de France in 1864, he was elected to the chair in 1866, the year that also saw the publication of his translation of the first volume of Bopp's *Comparative Grammar*.

In his introduction he launched the first of what were to be many attacks on Schlegel. Conceptually, this took a threefold form. First, he toppled Sanskrit from the pedestal on which Schlegel had placed it; the search, via

[59] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 295.

[60] The best account of Bréal's importance is by Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (London, 1982).

Sanskrit or proto-Sanskrit, for *Urindogermanish* was not merely vacuous (a body of thought draped in 'un épais brouillard d'hypothèses' (a thick fog of hypotheses)[61]), but a betrayal of the true purpose of linguistic research (the historical development of actual languages as opposed to purely speculative ones).[62] Secondly, he dismissed the notion that the inflectional 'root' might supply the royal road to the higher understanding (roots, according to Bréal, were abstract reconstructions, not empirical realities). Thirdly, he questioned the primacy granted to morphology. The study of 'forms' was essential, but should be subordinated to the study of 'functions'. By 'functions' Bréal meant essentially 'meanings', thus laying the foundations for what would later be his major contribution to linguistic science—namely, semantics (his *Essai de sémantique* appearing in 1897). Bréal sought to displace morphology with semantics by virtue of a more general view of the nature of language: as, in different terms, for Humboldt, language is fundamentally about its speakers, their perceptions, intentions, volitions, and other mental states. It was not, therefore, a fourth kingdom of nature, as the organicists held, possessed of a dynamic 'life' independently of willed individual use and thus graspable in human terms as the embodiment of the *Volk*. This displacement of the ethno-biological by the psychological, along with the stress on the individual speaker rather than on the tribal collective, furnished the theoretical ground on which Bréal stood firm against the assimilation of language to the categories of race and nation: 'Il n'y a rien ici qui puisse être assimilé aux caractères physiques par lesquels se reconnaît une race … l'hérédité de tel ou tel idiome est une fiction' (There is nothing here that can be assimilated to the physical characteristics that identify a given race … the racial heredity of any given language is itself a fiction).[63] The idea of 'linguistic purity' is an illusion (a form of 'idolatry') and doubly so when seeing 'dans la pureté de la langue quelque chose de semblable à la pureté de la race' (in the purity of a language something similar to the purity of a race).[64] 'Contamination' (Bréal's own

[61] Michel Bréal, 'Introduction' to Franz Bopp, *Grammaire comparée des langues indo-européennes* (Paris, 1866), p. x.

[62] See also the article 'Grimm's Law', where the term 'Indo-Germanic' as used by Grimm is described as a 'somewhat immodest phrase'. More generally, if Grimm is 'one of the fathers of modern philology', he is also 'one of the fathers, one of the teachers, and, it must be said, one of the creators of German patriotism'. In relation to this latter offspring, Bréal does not hesitate: 'Thus, on anything which even remotely concerns the word "German" his views need to be treated with caution.' The substance of his review is more than simply cautionary: Grimm's hypothesis (the *Lautverschiebung*) is, respectfully but relentlessly, taken apart ('Grimm's Law', in *Michel Bréal: The Beginnings of Semantics*, ed. and trans. George Wolf (Stanford, Calif., 1991), 283–92).

[63] Bréal, 'Le Langage et les nationalités', 629.

[64] Michel Bréal, 'Qu'appelle-t-on pureté de la langue?', in *Essai de sémantique*, ed. Gérard Monfort (Brionne, 1982), 259.

word, doubtless with Schlegel's separating wall of inflection in mind[65]) was not only a fact of language but a welcome one (the importation of foreign words into a native language, for example, was for the most part a blessing, in that it promoted 'un échange international de relations' (an international exchange of relations)[66]); more generally, Bréal argued consistently in favour of contact, mixture, and hybridity across the boundaries of race and nation.

Bréal's work constituted a watershed in establishing the French 'school of linguistics' with a distinctive intellectual identity of its own and foreshadowing the subsequent developments that were to break once and for all with the organicist heresy by emphasizing the view of language as a 'system' (Saussure studied in Paris while Bréal was still teaching[67]). Much of the work was, of course, written and published long after Sainte-Beuve's death, but its first phase (1864–70), which included the translation of Bopp and the early lectures at the Collège de France, overlapped with Sainte-Beuve's final years. Even at this stage there was some serious stocktaking. As Bréal looked out and back from his chair at the Collège de France, he saw that the discipline had been heavily compromised by the illicit transfer of some of its preoccupations and discoveries to social and political ends. Although he never lost his sense of composure and his belief that prejudice could be routed by disinterestedly rational enquiry, there were moments when he must have viewed with consternation the tide that seemed to be flooding the intellectual landscape. His decisive reckoning with this will come later (most notably in the splendid essay on language and 'nationality'), but already in the 1860s he pinpointed with unerring accuracy the precise site from which these illicit appropriations had sprung: the alliance of Schlegel's linguistics with Creuzer's mythography. Thus he wrote of the mystique of Inflection in the introduction to the Bopp translation:

Quand on examine de près cette théorie, on voit qu'elle tient de la façon la plus intime du symbolisme de Creuzer. Le professeur d'Heidelberg appuyait aussi ses explications sur cette faculté d'intuition dont l'homme était doué à l'origine, et qui lui révélait des rapports mystérieux entre les idées et les signes; il parlait des dieux, des mythes, des emblèmes, dans les mêmes termes que Schlegel des formes grammaticales: tous deux se référaient à une éducation mystérieuse que le genre humain, ou du moins une portion privilégiée de la famille humaine, aurait reçue dans son enfance. Aux assertions de

[65] 'The first law to be studied—not that it is the most important one, but because it is one of the easiest to observe—is *contamination*' ('The Intellectual Laws of Language: A Sketch in Semantics', in *Michel Bréal: The Beginnings of Semantics*, ed. and trans. Wolf, 137).

[66] Bréal, 'Qu'appelle-t-on pureté de la langue?', 264.

[67] On Saussure's debt to Bréal, see Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, 393: 'Bréal was the great innovator who gave French linguistics the distinct and powerful form that by a sort of delayed reaction struck the world in its summa, Saussure's *Cours*.'

Creuzer, Schlegel apportait le secours de sa connaissance récente de l'Inde. Après les études qui venaient de le conduire jusqu'au berceau de la race, le doute, assurait-il, n'était plus possible: la perfection de l'idiome, non moins que la majesté de la poésie et la grandeur des systèmes philosophiques, attestait que les ancêtres des Indous avaient étés éclairés d'une 'sagesse' particulière.

When this theory is carefully examined, it becomes clear that it adheres most closely to the symbolism of Creuzer. The Heidelberg professor, like Schlegel, also supported his explanations by reference to that faculty of intuition with which man was endowed at his creation, and which revealed to him the mysterious relationships between ideas and signs. He speaks of gods, myths, and symbols in the same terms that Schlegel speaks of grammatical forms: both refer to a mysterious education that the human race—or at least a privileged portion thereof—received in its infancy. Schlegel supported the assertions of Creuzer on the basis of his newly acquired knowledge of India. After the studies that had recently led him to the cradle of the race, doubt, he assured us, was no longer possible: the perfection of the language, no less than the majesty of the poetry and the grandeur of the philosophical systems, attested that the ancestors of the Hindus had been enlightened with a special 'wisdom'.[68]

This is arguably the best available short encapsulation of the whole saga. It is also perhaps no accident that Bréal's first endeavours were in the field of comparative religion and mythology, since it was above all here, in France as well as in Germany, that the new thinking had taken hold. Bréal argued vigorously against the 'symbolic' and 'pantheist' readings of the Vedic myths encouraged by Creuzer, according to which the material and the transcendental were harmonized in a relation of sensuous embodiment (just as Schlegel had posited Sanskrit as the perfect blending of sign and being). Bréal developed the alternative hypothesis whereby the Vedic representation of divine forces by means of physical phenomena were 'metaphors' consciously known to be such by their users, and that it was only later that these metaphors were naturalized (as the proper names of the gods).[69] If the issue was arcane to a degree, it was nevertheless from such sources that much of the prevailing climate of opinion had derived its inspiration. This was especially the case in connection with the group Schwab designates as the 'esotericists' (in order to distinguish them from the professional philological scholars). Whereas the latter on the whole stood aloof from wider public opinion, the former were all too avid for some degree of public impact and recognition.[70] These were something of a motley crew of thinkers, critics, and poets, but it is clear from the suite of profiles and

[68] Bréal, 'Introduction' to Bopp, *Grammaire comparée des langues indo-européennes*, p. xxiv.

[69] Michel Bréal, *Mélanges de mythologie et de linguistique*, quoted in Perrine Simon-Nahum, 'Les Intellectuels juifs français et la philologie allemande: Un débat scientifique et idéologique (1860–1914)', *Romantisme*, 73 (1991), 71.

[70] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 121, 259.

vignettes Schwab provides that, where the Schlegelian–Creuzerian influence was concerned, there were four main players: the Baron Eckstein, Quinet, Guigniaut, and Ozanam.

Eckstein, a long-time resident of Paris, was something of an intellectual gadfly, but his thirst for things Indic was unquenchable. Having studied with Creuzer in Heidelberg, he was close to Friedrich Schlegel (as Sainte-Beuve points out in his article on Heine[71]), became one of the founders of the *Revue germanique,* and was to peddle the Sanskritic line with considerable relish in his 1835 essay 'Sur les rapports de l'Inde et l'Europe' (it was not for nothing that Heine dubbed him the 'baron Buddha'), while fostering the Indic–Persian–Greek–Teutonic alignment by claiming a special relation between the ancient epics and the *Nibelungenlied*. Quinet meanwhile, one of the more powerful in organizing the whole 'Indo-Iranian' domain in France, dedicated his translation of Herder to Creuzer, although he was subsequently to criticize him harshly. He also revised his pro-Germanist leanings in *L'Allemagne et l'Italie*, with its long introduction deploring German nationalism (in particular the 'Asiatic patriotism' of Görres, although in the *Génie des religions* he was to prove more forgiving of Görres) and restoring the virtues of the French seventeenth century.[72] Guigniaut, himself more of a qualified philologist, was also a keen supporter of Creuzer, and in 1825 published a translation of *Symbolik und Mythologie de alten Völker*, accompanied by a commentary that, while proposing major revisions to Creuzer's interpretation of India (effectively tantamount to a rewriting of the first section of Creuzer's book), remained nevertheless imbued with the spirit of Creuzer's brand of 'Christo-Brahmanism'.[73] Guigniaut, however, was a model of rational and scholarly sobriety compared with Ozanam. Disciple of Creuzer, friend of Eckstein, Ozanam campaigned tirelessly on behalf of the Christo-Brahmanic cause, detecting in Sanskrit thought and literature a 'primitive' form of Christianity[74] (Eckstein had already coined the

[71] *Pr.L.* ii. 249.

[72] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 126, 213, 260, 276–8, 285.

[73] Simon-Nahum, 'Les Intellectuels juifs français et la philologie allemande', 70.

[74] Ozanam, however, was neither an ethno-nationalist nor a pagan primitivist, and remained hostile to Germany and the model of the German barbarian on just these grounds. His fervent adherence to the Indo-European story was based entirely on his religious beliefs, according to which the origins of Christianity in the Vedic wisdom embraced the whole of the Indo-European family, while privileging no one national component of it; in his oddly focused way, he was an internationalist cosmopolitan (see Charles Rearick, *Beyond the Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington, Ind., 1974), 139). Sainte-Beuve was not impressed. Ozanam's study of Dante, while erudite and passionate (though never in the same class as that of the great Fauriel) got the following back-hander of an accolade: 'doué d'enthousiasme, et les yeux dirigés vers un soleil qui l'éclairait plus vivement sur quelques points, et qui l'éblouissait peut-être sur quelques autres' (endowed with enthusiasm, his gaze turned

expression 'anterior Christianity'), and distinguishing typologically between 'rationalists' and 'traditionalists' (the latter, who included Görres, Creuzer, Schlegel, Eckstein, Ballanche, and Bonald, were naturally the ones on the side of the angels).[75]

There were of course many others: Egger ('a fervent disciple of Eckstein'); Amiel (who took seriously the thought that a corrupted Europe might be redeemed through the study of Sanskrit); Mohl, the translator of Firdawsi, though Mohl was an altogether more cosmopolitan sort; Michelet, who was known to melt ecstatically while contemplating the Indic miracle; and then there were also the poets, most notably Victor Hugo, who jumped on the bandwagon in the preface to *Les Orientales* before smartly jumping off when other options presented themselves.[76] But all these pale into insignificance alongside the figure who, in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, was to become France's dominant public intellectual, Ernest Renan. Although he was an assiduous and devoted pupil of Burnouf (dedicating *L'Avenir de la science* to him), Renan's significance as a philologist is negligible; as many commentators have noted, he is virtually absent from the standard academic histories of the subject.[77] He was rather an extraordinarily learned and influential intellectual who brought philology and its possibilities to the attention of a wider public or, as Said puts it, in a more Foucauldian idiom:

> Renan was a figure in his own right neither of total originality nor of absolute derivativeness … [he] is best grasped as a dynamic force whose opportunities were already created for him by pioneers like Sacy, yet who brought their achievements into the culture as a kind of currency which he circulated and recirculated with (to force the image a little further) his own unmistakable re-currency. Renan is a figure who must be grasped, in short, as a type of intellectual and cultural praxis, as a style for making Orientalist statements within what Michel Foucault would call the archive of his time.[78]

to a sun which shed a sharper light on certain points while perhaps blinding him on others) (*CL* xi. 207). Elsewhere Sainte-Beuve railed politely against being force-fed and subjected to an inflationary publicity drive: 'nous avons tous, à doses plus ou moins inégales, avalé de l'Ozanam, de cet ardent et vigoureux écolier dont ils sont en train de faire un grand homme' (we have all swallowed, in more or less equal doses, something of Ozanam, of this ardent and vigorous pupil who is now in the process of being billed as a great man) (*CL* xv. 288–9).

[75] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 221. See Constant's critique of Görres and Creuzer, Eckstein and Schlegel, in Pierre Deguise, *Benjamin Constant méconnu: Le Livre 'De la Religion'* (Geneva, 1966), 232–58.

[76] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 126, 127, 226.

[77] Murpurgo Davies describes him as 'a dilettante of genius' (*Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 157).

[78] Said, *Orientalism*, 130.

Renan's views are hard to summarize, partly because they underwent substantial changes throughout his working life, partly because they were trapped in a spectacular oscillation between the genuinely 'scientific' and the nakedly ideological. In *L'Avenir de la science* (written in 1848 but not published until 1890) and then later in the Collège de France lectures inviting his audience to join him in the 'philological laboratory', he staked a claim to the importance of philology as fundamental to the human sciences. But also in 1848 he re-entered the speculative game of reflection on the origins of language (*De l'origine du langage*). He was subsequently to resile, at least partially, from such speculations in his preface to the 1859 translation of Jakob Grimm's *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*, claiming that Grimm's obsessions had eclipsed 'le problème essentiel de la philologie, qui est tout historique' (the essential problem of philology, which is entirely historical).[79] But in the second edition (1858) of his own book on origins he was to redeploy some of Grimm's ideas, and from the first edition onwards there was an explicit acknowledgement of a major debt to Schlegel. The 'science des langues', Renan claimed, owed much to Schlegel,[80] but in what respects the debt could plausibly be called 'science' remained moot. What in fact Renan took over from Schlegel were four of the least intellectually reputable of his main propositions. First, there was the equation of origins with a higher order of complexity or 'synthesis' (in Schlegel, the identification, via Sanskrit, of origins with 'perfection'). Secondly, he echoed the view of language as a 'vegetal' organism. Thirdly he espoused the polygenetic thesis in terms that were pure Schlegel. Fourthly, he made the distinction between 'naturally spiritualist languages' and others not so endowed.[81]

This distinction was worked, if with qualifications, in Renan's one foray into serious philological research (as distinct from his general thoughts *about* philology)—namely, his treatise on the Semitic languages, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (finished in 1847 and published in 1855). In the preface Renan stated that he wanted to do for Semitic what Bopp had done for Indo-European.[82] But, if his ambition was to rival Bopp, this did not prevent him from bypassing one of Bopp's exemplary lessons: the demolition job he had performed on Schlegel's grouping of language families according to the criterion of inflection. Renan grounded the evaluative distinction between 'spiritualist' languages and non-spiritualist ones in the same way as Schlegel, on the analytical distinction between the inflectional and the agglutinative,

[79] Murpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 195. [80] Ibid. 16.

[81] See Lisa Formigari, *Signs, Science and Politics: Philosophies of Language in Europe 1700–1830* (Amsterdam, 1993), 157–8. Formigari notes that at this stage Renan appears to have been 'unaware of the political implications of his thesis' and that later he will warn against the 'false' politics of language classification.

[82] Said, *Orientalism*, 139.

in turn illustrated by the Indo-European languages, on the one hand, and the Semitic languages, on the other. As agglutinative languages, Semitic was 'inorganic', 'mechanical', and thus lacking the 'germinal' powers attributed by Schlegel to root-based languages or what Renan himself terms 'la faculté de se régénérer' (the faculty of regenerating itself).[83] Here, yet again, was the philological substratum to a broader, and heavily judgemental, ethnology, whereby Semitic languages and cultures reflected an inferior form of 'human nature'. This was the assertion of the book's opening chapter, the infamous statement: 'Je suis donc le premier à reconnaître que la race sémitique, comparée à la race indo-européenne, représente réellement une combinaison inférieure de la nature humaine' (I am thus the first to recognize that the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, really does represent an inferior compound of human nature),[84] or, as he memorably put it in a way one would prefer to forget:

l'unité et la simplicité, qui distinguent la race sémitique, se retrouvent dans les langues sémitiques d'elles-mêmes. L'abstraction leur est inconnue; la métaphysique impossible … Imaginer un Aristote ou un Kant avec un pareil instrument est aussi impossible que de concevoir une *Iliade* ou un poème comme celui de Job écrits dans nos langues métaphysiques et compliquées.

the unity and simplicity that distinguish the Semitic race are also to be found in the Semitic languages themselves. Abstraction is unknown to them, metaphysics impossible … Imagining an Aristotle or a Kant with a similar instrument is as impossible as conceiving an *Iliad* or a poem like that of Job written in our metaphysical and complicated languages.[85]

The more general conclusion was even more forgettably memorable:

Ainsi la race sémitique se reconnaît presque uniquement à des caractères négatifs: elle n'a ni mythologie, ni épopée, ni science, ni philosophie, ni fiction, ni arts plastiques, ni vie civile, en tout, absence de complexité, de nuances, sentiment exclusif de l'unité.

Thus the Semitic race is to be recognized almost entirely by negative characteristics: it has neither mythology, nor epic, nor science, nor philosophy, nor fiction, nor plastic arts, nor civil life; in everything there is a complete absence of complexity, subtlety, or nuance, an exclusive feeling for unity.[86]

Renan of course was not an 'anti-Semite' in the terms in which we would understand the word today (nor for that matter was Schlegel).[87] He was

[83] Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (Paris, 1855), 143 (quoted in Said, *Orientalism*).

[84] Ibid. 4. [85] Ibid. 17–18. [86] Ibid. 16.

[87] Antoine Compagnon reminds us that for Renan 'race' was more a matter of language and culture than of physiology (*Connaissez-vous Brunetière?* (Paris, 1997), 154). On the other hand, the organicist metaphors informing Renan's thinking about language and culture veered powerfully towards the biological.

certainly not an uncritical worshipper at the Sanskrit shrine, and, as Schwab reminds us, when the chips were down did not hesitate to say that the Hebrew Bible mattered more to European culture than the 'Aryan Bible' of the Vedas.[88] He was also critical of Creuzer's effort to rewrite the history of religions on Christo-Brahmanic terms (in his review of Guigniaut's translation, although his critical remarks are confined entirely to the purely 'formal' aspects of Creuzer's account of myth, leaving on one side the far deeper question of 'function').[89] Yet in his philological work we find already the basic elements of his more general views on the radical inequality of races. In the *Études d'histoire religieuse* Renan outlines a hierarchical division of cultural labour across the 'peoples' and 'races' of the world, in which the better part is accorded to the Aryans (creative vitality), and the lesser part to Semites (as, in what established itself as a commonplace trope, a 'desert' people doomed to aridity and sterility). Renan's belief in the inequality of races never left him, even after the waning of his Germanist affiliations brought about by the disaster of the Franco-Prussian war. It is true that, in the letters addressed to David Strauss that form part of *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* in 1871 he repudiated the race/philology equation in favour of a liberal–republican outlook based not on blood but on consent.[90] But then in 1876, in the *Dialogues philosophiques*, the old temptation returns: 'les races ne sont pas égales' (the races are not equal).[91]

Renan's linguistico-cultural thinking was not, however, exhausted by the Indo-European/Semitic opposition. One explanation for his relative contempt for Semitic was his predilection for pantheism over monotheism, but the pagan spirit that appealed to him most was less Indic than Greek. Although at times he supported the herding of Greece into the Aryan fold,[92] he also thought of Greece as autonomous, as its own self-contained perfection, neither imitative nor imitable. Greece was our true beginning and the template for everything we have become:

[88] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 269. Under the general heading of 'Semitic', Renan distinguished between the Arabic and the Judaic components as follows: 'Encore doit-on reconnaître que la forme hébraïque s'est si promptement mélangée et dépassée si étonnamment en quelques points les limites de l'esprit particulier d'une race, que c'est vraiment l'Arabie qui doit être prise pour mesure de l'esprit sémitique' (Even so we must acknowledge that the Hebraic form was so quick to mix with other things, and at certain points so amazingly transcends the limits of the particular mentality of a race, that it is in truth Arabia which should be held up as the measure of the Semitic mind) (*Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, 13–14). In the same book (p. 2) Renan also makes clear that he intends 'Semitic' as a philological term to mean essentially 'syro-arabe' rather than Hebrew.

[89] Simon-Nahum, 'Les Intellectuels juifs français et la philologie allemande', 70.

[90] Ernest Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (Paris, 1871), 199.

[91] Renan, 'Préface', in *Dialogues philosophiques* (Paris, 1876), p. xvii.

[92] See Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 293.

Notre science, notre art, notre littérature, notre philosophie, notre morale, notre politique, notre stratégie, notre diplomatie, notre droit international, sont grecs d'origine. Le cadre de la culture humaine créé par la Grèce est susceptible d'être indéfiniment élargi; mais il est complet dans ses parties. Le progrès consistera éternellement à développer ce que la Grèce a conçu, à remplir les desseins qu'elle a, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, échantillonnés.

Our science, our art, our literature, our philosophy, our morality, our politics, our strategy, our diplomacy, our international law, are of Greek origin. The framework of human culture created by the Greeks is open to being indefinitely broadened; but in its different parts it is complete. Progress will forever consist in developing what Greece conceived, to fill out the sketches that she has, so to speak, sampled.[93]

The list here is long, and the backing claims breathtakingly grandiose (a more economical dithyramb will be the 'Prière à l'Acropole'). But if, at one level, this reflected a certain reserve in connection with the Aryan–Teutonic appropriation of Greece, its other target was, of course, Latinity. Greece was the answer to the hegemony of Rome. Once more the focus switched from the barrier separating the Indo-European languages from the outsider languages to a division within the Indo-European family itself, specifically from prejudice towards Semitic to the war on Romance. In *Mélanges d'histoire et de voyage* (1862) he wrote: 'La supériorité de la Grèce républicaine sur tout le reste de l'humanité, *et en particulier sur tout ce qu'ont fait les Latins*, ce principe fondamental que la Grèce est la source de tout art, de toute science, de toute noblesse, voilà un dogme capital' (The superiority of republican Greece over all the rest of humanity, *and in particular over everything accomplished by the Latins*, this fundamental principle whereby Greece is the source of all art, all science, all nobility, this is a dogma of capital importance).[94] The assertion of the 'autonomy' of Greece was thus a matter of rescuing it as much from the toils of Latinity as from the grip of the Aryanists. Renan's complaint is inward-addressed, to a specifically French tradition. As early as 1846, in the *Nouveaux cahiers de jeunesse*, we find him protesting against the 'dessicated' image of Greece that issues from the excessive 'classicizing' of Greek antiquity—that is to say, from 'Latinizing' it, and on a very specific cultural model: France is guilty of making Greece more 'dix-septième siècle' than she really is.[95] This is the point at which we must, after long delay, return to Sainte-Beuve.

[93] Ernest Renan, *Histoire du peuple d'Israël* (Paris, 1887), i. 11.

[94] Ernest Renan, *Mélanges d'histoire et de voyage* (Paris, 1878), 150 (emphasis added).

[95] Ernest Renan, *Nouveaux cahiers de jeunesse* (Paris, 1907), 195. Another spokesman for the role of Greece (rather than Rome) in the making of the French nation was L-A. Binaut. In 1841 Binaut published in the *Revue des deux mondes* his article 'Homère et la philosophie grecque', whose principal argument concerned the alleged link between ancient Greece and modern France mediated by the Frankish invasions (*Revue des deux mondes*, 25 (1841), 866–902).

## IV

Renan and Bréal: the opposition could serve as a shorthand for the two public faces of comparative philology in nineteenth-century France. In 1899 Bréal took Renan to task for 'la confusion commise par l'illustre écrivain (plus tard corrigée par lui), entre la linguistique et l'ethnologie, entre les familles d'idiomes et les races du globe' (the eminent writer's confusion (which he later corrected) between linguistics and ethnology, between the language families and the races of the world), specifically the comparison in *Système des langues sémitiques* between the conjugational forms of the Semitic and the Indo-European languages ('il trouve dans cette comparaison une confirmation de sa théorie des races' (he finds in this comparison a confirmation of his theory of race)).[96] Which of these two faces would have appealed more to Sainte-Beuve, and, more generally, where did he stand in relation to the various philological revolutions of his time? To a large extent, the answer has to be a matter of pure guesswork. The references to Sainte-Beuve in *La Renaissance orientale* are surprisingly extensive, especially given Schwab's own stress on Sainte-Beuve's relative silence vis-à-vis comparative philology and its various orientalist offshoots. But, if he flits through the pages of Schwab's book, it is more as an off-stage voice. It is certainly true that 'he denied us a comprehensive study of the orientalist movement', perhaps because, as Schwab astutely notes, 'if he had pumped his blood into the second Renaissance he would not have had enough left for the first'.[97]

Sainte-Beuve devoted two articles to Renan, in both of which the focus is on religion, one an account of Renan's *Vie de Jésus* as historiography, the other a portrait of Renan himself, in terms of the eminently secular project of the 'naturalist' typology sketched in 'Essai de critique naturelle', according to which minds and sensibilities can be grouped into different psychological 'families' or types. The Renan-type is that of the austere 'spiritualist', alien to the 'gaulois' values that, at least here, Sainte-Beuve sees as defining the French tradition, while at the same time a necessary corrective to its incorrigible frivolity.[98] There is no sustained engagement with Renan's philological work. Along with a passing reference to *De l'origine du langage* in a footnote to the piece on Bonald,[99] we have a paragraph on Renan 'dans sa direction philologique d'hébraïsant et d'arabisant' (his philological bent as a specialist

[96] Michel Bréal, 'Les Commencements du verbe', in *Essai de sémantique*, ed. Monfort, 353–4.
[97] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 265, 317.
[98] See Wolf Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 289–94.
[99] *CL* iv. 446.

in Hebrew and Arabic) and his debts to Burnouf, but not a word on the philological theses themselves, although there is, perhaps by association, a comment in the next paragraph on Renan's historical method couched in the metaphors of 'root' and 'vegetation' (Renan approaches 'le tout sous l'aspect de la production et de végétation vivante continue, depuis la racine, depuis la germination sourde, et à travers tous les développements, jusqu'à la fleur' (his whole field of enquiry from the point of view of the continuously living process of production and growth, from the root, from silent germination through all stages of development to the flower)).[100] There is little here from which one could infer the taking of a position in the philology wars.

Yet, although largely a bystander or interested amateur, Sainte-Beuve appears to have been relatively well acquainted with several of the new currents of thought and scholarship. In the 1830s he frequented the Mary Clarke/Mohl salon, and also a 'liberal' circle that included Quinet, Ampère, Mohl, Fauriel, and Thierry, many of whom had, if with substantial reservations, immersed themselves in the Asiatic revival, and he seems to have followed subsequent developments in philological science well into the 1860s. At the very least, there is a flickering procession of proper names throughout his critical writings, in which many of the principal players make an appearance, however perfunctory: Humboldt, Bopp, and Grimm from Germany, and, from France, Burnouf, Guigniaut, Mohl, Bréal, and Renan, are all there,[101] although there are also significant omissions (crucially, Friedrich Schlegel, and it may well be Sainte-Beuve did not read *Über die Sprache und Wesiheit der Indier*, even though the linguistic portion was translated into French in 1805 and the entire text translated by Mazure in 1837).[102] He sketched portraits of Ampère and Fauriel, but these were inspired essentially by his personal friendship with them and were more concerned with medieval literary studies than with Indic themes. For the most part, his comments are brief, mainly in the form of ritual genuflections to the labours of a scholarly community, without any manifest taking of sides in the conflict of interpretations or the polemics of extra-disciplinary appropriations of the new philological discoveries on either side of the Rhine (with, as we shall see, the important exception of those

[100] *NL* ii. 393–5.

[101] On Bopp, Humboldt, and Grimm, see *Pr.L.* iii. 13; on Burnouf (as 'esprit supérieur, pour la méthode et le tact scientifique' (a superior mind in both method and scientific tact)), see *NL* ii. 393; on Guigniaut, see *PL* 162; on Mohl (as 'le savant orientaliste et mieux que cela, mieux qu'un savant, un sage: esprit clair, loyal, étendu, esprit allemand passé au filtre anglais' (the learned orientalist, and indeed not only that, more than a scholar, a sage: a mind that is clear, loyal, broad, a German mind passed through an English filter)), see *NL* xiii. 235–6; on Bréal ('l'israélite Bréal, l'ingénieux mythologue de l'école de Renan' (the Israelite, Bréal, the clever mythologist out of Renan's school)—a misdescription if ever there were one), see *NL* viii. 76.

[102] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 75.

appropriations that sought to downgrade the claims of Latinity, especially as embodied by the age of Louis XIV).

He seems to have painlessly absorbed the Indo-European thesis, even deploying more or less unselfconsciously the controversial term *indo-germanique*. In his biography of Proudhon, he deems the latter's linguistic enquiries to have been defective because, confining himself to the 'branches grecque et latine' as well as the 'tronc sémitique' of language comparison, Proudhon ignored 'tout le cours supérieur de dérivation indo-germanique' (the whole superior school of thought of Indo-Germanic derivation), and thus the 'beaux travaux' and 'pénétrantes découvertes' of 'les Bopp, les Grimm, les Guillaume de Humboldt' (but significantly Schlegel is not included).[103] In the article on Grote's *History of Greece*, Sainte-Beuve maintains that its French translation, and hence its reception, are altogether enhanced by having had as translator a scholar (de Sadous) versed in Sanskrit:

Il importait que l'ouvrage de M. Grote … nous arrivât par les soins d'un traducteur familier avec la langue grecque; et pour tout indianiste initié au sanscrit, le grec n'est qu'un développement relativement aisé et comme une branche collatérale et dérivée de ses premières et hautes études de linguistique.

It mattered that M. Grote's work … came to us via the scruplous efforts of a translator familiar with the Greek language; and, for any Indianist who has been initiated to Sanskrit, the Greek language is but a relatively straightforward development, a sort of collateral and derivative branch, of his early and lofty linguistic studies.[104]

The compliment is not quite tantamount to an endorsement (of the claim that Greek derives from Sanskrit), but Sainte-Beuve comes closer to the latter in remarks about Frédéric Baudry, the professor of comparative classical languages, who asserted the common Asiatic origins of the Indo-Germanic peoples:

élève de Burnouf, il a pris le sanscrit pour son domaine; mais ce n'est point un philologue pur, et il a surtout marqué sa vocation scientifique originale en faisant avancer d'un pas la branche d'études qui tend à montrer que les anciens peuples venus d'Asie en Europe, et qu'on désigne sous le nom d'indo-germaniques, ont eu, à l'origine, un même système de mythes, comme ils ont eu une même langue.

as a pupil of Burnouf, he specialized in Sanskrit; but he is not a pure philologist, and has above all made his mark and shown originality in the scientific vocation by taking one step further that branch of study indicating that the ancient peoples that migrated from Asia to Europe, and that are designated 'Indo-Germanic', had, at the beginning, a same system of myths, just as they had a same language.[105]

[103] *P.-J. Proudhon : Sa vie et sa correspondance 1838–1848* (Paris, 1875), 21.
[104] *NL* x. 47. [105] *NL* iii. 421–2.

This too defers to the authority of others ('Le petit nombre de juges compétents en pareille matière reconnaissent que, dans cette voie des investigations analytiques comparées, M. Baudry est un maître' (The small number of judges competent in the matter acknowledge that, in this field of comparative analytical enquiry, M. Baudry is a master)), but an alignment of personal view with received specialist opinion is starting to emerge, and does so even more visibly in the assertion of 'De la tradition': 'Toutes les nations qui se sont détachées successivement du point central, du cœur de l'Asie, sont reconnues aujourd'hui pour des frères et sœurs de la même famille empreinte au front d'un air de noblesse' (All the nations that successively diverged from the central point, from the heart of Asia, are recognized today as the brothers and sisters of the same family, whose forehead is imprinted with an air of nobility).[106]

This is, however, little more than the small change of what, by the 1850s and 1860s, were historico-ethnological clichés. They do not amount to a considered position. Indeed, even in the 1830s, at the time of his Saint-Simonian flirtations, when he was encountering Indic themes and assorted brands of mysticism in his readings of Ballanche and Saint-Martin, he held back (his novel *Volupté* was in part a recantation of these seductions).[107] Basically, Sainte-Beuve's stance is non-committal, the attitude of an interested outsider keeping abreast of things without being of any particular party or persuasion, an attitude best summed up in his response to Nodier's *Éléments de linguistique*: 'Ces sortes de questions dépassent de beaucoup le cercle des conjectures sur lesquelles nous nous permettons d'avoir un avis' (These kinds of questions lie well beyond the circle of conjectures on which we allow ourselves to hold an opinion).[108] On

[106] *CL* xv. 360. In his discussion of Perrault's *Contes*, Sainte-Beuve toys with the idea of the Asiatic, Germanic, and Celtic origins of collective popular oral culture, but only in order to suspend judgement as to its validity ('Il est permis là-dessus de rêver plus qu'il n'est possible de répondre' (We can be permitted to dream on this more than we are able to provide answers) (*NL* i. 311–12)).

[107] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 238. In 1854—by now fully inoculated—Sainte-Beuve wrote a sympathetic retrospect, in which he rehearsed Saint-Martin's dispute with the materialist Garat (one of the leading *Idéologues*). Saint-Martin was handed the victory laurels, in part because of the negative association by the later Sainte-Beuve of 'materialism' with 'revolution' ('Saint-Martin, philosophe inconnu', *CL* x. 235–78).

[108] *PL* 322. In the review of Viollet-le-Duc, Sainte-Beuve similarly hesitates over the determination of differences in architectural styles: 'Y a-t-il, a cet égard, des différences fondamentales et premières qui tiennent à la race même et aux dispositions physiologiques … Sont-ce là, en un mot, des spécialités inhérentes à la race, et les différences en ce genre tiennent-elles à une autre cause qu'à l'état des matières premières qu'on avait sous la main dans des lieux différents? De telles questions sont environnées de trop d'incertitudes pour pouvoir sans doute être jamais tranchées' (In this respect, are there fundamental and primary differences linked to race itself and physiological aptitudes … In a word, do we have here specialisms inherent to race, and are differences of this type to be ascribed to a cause other than that of the condition of those primary

the other hand, the tone gets distinctly edgier when Indo-German passions are directed antagonistically towards France, French, and the culture of Latinity, which may explain his curiously lenient view of Rivarol's universalist claims on behalf of French.[109] Since the Germans saw the latter, quite rightly, as a form of cultural imperialism, this might be a case of the pot calling the kettle black, a reverse mirror image of blood-line nationalism.[110] It may also explain Sainte-Beuve's mildly hostile remarks about foreigners in Paris engaged in anti-French enterprises, directed most notably at A. W. Schlegel, whom on various occasions Sainte-Beuve raps over the knuckles for his notoriously vehement Gallophobia,[111] and to some extent also Eckstein (although they were personally on good terms[112]). It is also possible that he may have had Klaproth in mind, whose diatribe on 'Germania birthrights and race-rights' was delivered to the Société Asiatique in 1823 (he died in Paris in 1835).[113] These were doubtless as much moments of personal irritation as a declaration of a culture war, but they were also symptomatic of a more general view of deep national differences. This was to come to the fore in the 1843 foray into

materials to hand in different places? Such questions are doubtless surrounded by too many uncertainties ever to be solved) (NL vii. 163).

[109] *CL* v. 66.

[110] The glory of Bossuet's French derives from its fidelity to 'l'hérédité latine', defined as 'ce français neuf, plein, substantiel, dans le sens de la racine' (that French that is new, full, substantial, in the sense of the root) (*NL* ii. 348–9). In his counter to Du Bellay's linguistic voluntarism, he invokes the perspective of organicism: 'les langues sont nées *comme plantes et herbes*' (languages are born *like plants and herbs*) (*NL* xiii. 301–2, emphasis in original). Generally speaking, however, botanical metaphors in Sainte-Beuve's criticism derive more from eighteenth-century taxonomy than from romantic organicism.

[111] In 'Notre littérature à l'étranger', while the focus was more on English prejudices vis-à-vis contemporary French writing, Sainte-Beuve also turns on Tieck and more explicitly A. W. Schlegel ('cet illustre critique a toujours été assez injuste, et, malgré les années qu'il a vécu ici, toujours assez mal informé à notre égard' (this illustrious critic has always been somewhat unjust and, despite the years he has lived here, always rather ill-informed in respect of us) (*Pr.L.* ii. 307–8). The resentment seems to have rankled, since he returns to it in the article on Guillaume Fabre: 'Il [Schlegel] n'était pas fâché, tout en rendant une éclatante justice à l'Antiquité et aux nations étrangères, de faire une sorte de réaction contre la gloire littéraire de la France … Il y eut là un coin de faiblesse et, on peut dire, d'infirmité chez un si grand esprit. Il ne nous aimait pas' (He was quite happy, while doing spectacular justice to Antiquity and foreign nations, to mount a kind of reaction against the literary fame of France … That was the weak spot and, one might say, the Achilles heel of such a fine mind. He did not like us) (*CL* xiii. 241–3). For a different sort of German in Paris, see Sainte-Beuve's complimentary remarks about Heine ('il est des nôtres autant que le spirituel Grimm l'a jamais été' (he is one of us as much as the witty Grimm ever was) (*Pr.L.* ii. 250)). Where A. W. Schlegel was concerned, it is, however, worth recalling that he attacked the rabidly nationalistic Klaproth (see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 185).

[112] In the article on Heine, Sainte-Beuve praises Eckstein as an 'homme de grand savoir et d'une véritable étendue d'esprit' (a man of great learning and with the broadest of minds) (*Pr.L.* ii. 249).

[113] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 84.

the 'Homer' debate, where French enthusiasm for 'philological' imports from Germany is sternly rebuked:

> Cependant, au milieu de ces développements pleins d'éclat et de cette restitution opérée dans les dehors de la littérature, il restait beaucoup à faire au dedans pour les études positives, et chez un grand nombre d'esprits, comme il arrive souvent en France, le sentiment allait plus vite que la connaissance et le labeur. On parlait à merveille du génie des écrivains et du caractère des œuvres, dont on eût pratiqué difficilement les textes. Ce désaccord, qui tenait à la rapidité du temps et à l'empressement honorable des premières générations, a graduellement cessé; depuis une douzaine d'années surtout, l'Université ne se lasse pas de former dans ses écoles, d'exercer dans ses concours, une jeune et forte milice qui soutiendrait le choc dans les luttes philologiques contre nos rivaux d'outre-Rhin.
>
> Nevertheless, in the midst of these brilliant developments and this reconstruction operated at the outer edges of literature, there remained, inside the literary field, a great deal to be done for the progress of positive study, and, as often happens in France, with a large number of scholars sentiment outstripped knowledge and work. One discoursed to perfection on the genius of writers and the character of their works, the text of which they would have had some difficulty in studying closely. This discrepancy, which can be attributed to fast-moving times and the honourable sense of urgency felt by earlier generations, has gradually disappeared; above all, in the last dozen years, the University has been diligent in forming schools, organizing competitions, forming a young and strong militia capable of absorbing the shock of philological conflicts with our rivals across the Rhine.[114]

Discounting the respects in which this is the kind of prose that leads one to suspect that Sainte-Beuve must have been one of the models for Proust's Norpois, here we see Sainte-Beuve drawing a line in the sand (or along the Rhine). It is unclear precisely what intellectual territories the line is designed to mark: it is possibly the map of a rivalry scenario played out on common terrain, but could also be read as the tracing of a distance, a difference in kind rather than degree: it is not just that the French now do the same thing as well as or better than the Germans, but rather that they do something different. Licence for the latter view can be had from two general sources, the first drawing on the distinction between the disciplines of philology and linguistics, the second engaging the contentious issue of 'origins'. The former turns on the distinction between the science of spoken forms and investigation of the written (the editing of manuscripts and the interpretation of texts), along with the related distinction between the oral history of popular mentalities and the study of 'literature' calling at once for contextual setting and judgements of value. It was a distinction that was often blurred in the nineteenth century, but

[114] *PC* v. 331.

that Sainte-Beuve insists on preserving: in 'Du point de départ et des origines de la langue et de la littérature françaises', France is posited as the home of 'philology' understood as the tradition of patient textual exegesis devoted to recovering a past otherwise doomed to oblivion, in contrast to the 'scientific' linguistics of the German school:

> les érudits français purs, j'appelle ainsi ceux qui ne se souciaient pas de travaux allemands, des principes généraux de linguistique, et de cette science de formation récente due aux travaux de Guillaume de Humboldt, de Jacob Grimm et de Franz Bopp, mais qui pratiquaient et maniaient les vieux textes.
>
> the pure French scholars, I term thus those who were not concerned with the work of the Germans, with the general principles of linguistics and that recent science of language formation that comes out of the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Jakob Grimm, and Franz Bopp, but who studied and handled the old texts.[115]

When Sainte-Beuve said, 'Voilà la période de la philologie qui commence' (Now begins the period of philology),[116] he meant something corresponding to one dimension of his own literary interests, an early form of the hermeneutic enterprise of examining texts in order to reconstruct 'meanings', as measured by a recoverable authorial intention or a historically bounded horizon of conventions and expectations (what Lanson will later posit as a key principle of literary history).

Sainte-Beuve's wish to remain firmly this side of the Rhine is also to be found in his occasional engagements with the vexed issue of 'origins', both the particular question of the origins of French and the larger question of the origins of language as such. With respect to the former, he gave short shrift to the Celto-nationalists. We have already noted Sainte-Beuve's dismissal of Du Bellay's thesis on the Gaulish origins of French, though, of course, its resurrection in the conditions of the nineteenth century carried a new set of implications that would never have occurred to Du Bellay. Drawing on a number of eighteenth-century speculations,[117] certain members of the

[115] *Pr.L.* iii. 113 On the difference between France and Germany, see also Sainte-Beuve's remarks in the Chateaubriand book: 'Toute nation livrée à elle-même et à son propre génie se fait une critique littéraire qui y est conforme. La France, en son beau temps, a eu la sienne, qui ne ressemble ni à celle de l'Allemagne, ni à celle de ses autres voisins;—un peu plus superficielle, dira-t-on;—je ne le crois pas; mais plus vive, moins chargée d'érudition, moins théorique et systématique, plus confiante au sentiment immédiat du goût' (Every nation free to cultivate itself and its own type of genius develops a commensurate literary criticism. At its finest hour, France had its own, which resembles neither that of Germany nor that of its other neighbours—a little more superficial, it will be said; I do not believe this; but livelier, less burdened with erudition, less theoretical and systematic, more confident in the immediate sentiment of taste) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 311).

[116] *PC* v. 199.

[117] On the sponsorship of the thesis of the Celtic origins of French by the *Encyclopédie*, see Tullio de Mauro and Lea Formigari (eds.), *Leibniz, Humboldt and the Origins of Comparativism*

Académie Celtique (founded in 1805), pre-eminently Lavallée and Johanneau, claimed, by means of a delirious etymology that was to be ridiculed by Volney, that Celtic was the *Ursprache*, while the intrepid Nicholas de Bonneville 'saw Celtic culture everywhere and in everything'.[118] The key move was to relate Celtic and Sanskrit. Bopp had established the place of Celtic in the Indo-European family (whereas Jones had relegated it to an indeterminate place at the margins, a view shared by Schlegel, partly because of his anti-French positions). The linguist Adolphe Pictet made the case for Celtic as a fully-fledged Aryan language,[119] and, once Celto-nationalism joined forces with Indo-Germanism, they both became faces of the anti-Romanist party, set on bypassing altogether the detested heritage of Rome. In one of his several phases, Michelet will be of this party, most notably in the early moments of the forty-year project of writing the *Histoire de France* (in the opening chapters of which he alleged that there were far more Celtic words in French than generally acknowledged[120]), although Michelet's championing of the Helleno-Celtic spirit also had the Germanic as well as the Roman invader in its sights, an emphasis that was later to spawn a whole historiographical trend reclaiming an autochthonous Celtic 'nation' allegedly ruined by both the Romans and the Franks.[121]

To the extent that Sainte-Beuve was familiar with these trends, the perfunctory attention he accorded them was directly proportional to his inability or unwillingness to take them seriously. On the Celto-enthusiast Nicholas de Bonneville, he is simply withering.[122] For the most part, he confines his remarks on both the philological and historiographical speculations of the Celtists to contemptuous or irony-laden footnotes. In 'L'Orthographie française', he tosses, in passing, a bone from the Latinist table, conceding that around a sixth of the French lexicon cannot be derived from Latin, such that perhaps the Celtists have some grounds for residual 'hope' (meaning, of course, that in fact the case is hopeless).[123] Another aside—another footnote—rounds on Granier de Cassagnac's outrageously tendentious portraits

(Amsterdam, 1990). On the origins of linguistic Celtomania, see Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, 46–7.

[118] Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 257.

[119] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 83.

[120] See Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), 107.

[121] See Krzysztof Pomian, 'Francs et Gaulois', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt. 3, *Les France* (Paris, 1992), i. 41–105.

[122] *PL* 311–12.

[123] 'Les défenseurs des vieilles racines celtiques et indigènes peuvent garder un restant d'espoir de ce côté' (The defenders of the old Celtic and indigeneous roots can hold on to a remnant of hope) (*NL* xi. 205).

of 'les hommes de la Révolution' (the context is Sainte-Beuve's article on Saint-Just). Since Cassagnac also shared, with some considerable fervour, the Celtist persuasions, we may take Sainte-Beuve's peremptory dismissal of Cassagnac's abuse of historical method as referring to more than his way with the history of the French Revolution.[124] But even more telling are the terms in which he holds to the converse view (the view to which he himself was drawn). We know from the criticism of Du Bellay that Sainte-Beuve was wedded to the theory of the Latin derivation of French, but not to the point of allowing scholarly scruple to be drowned by ideological prejudice. In 'Origines de la langue et de la littérature françaises', he explores and defends the Latinist theory in the form of an extended and discriminating commentary on an array of sources. We will need to discuss this commentary in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. For now, it is noteworthy that the defence of the theory expressly seeks to disembarrass itself of some of the organicist metaphorical baggage inherited from German comparative philology—most importantly, the notion of linguistic 'purity'. The argument of the French grammarian Burguy (heavily influenced by the German Fuchs) that 'les langues romanes sont un développement *organique* du vieil idiome latin vulgaire' (the Romance languages are an *organic* development of the old Latin vernacular) rests entirely on 'des analogies bien légères et bien lointaines' (lightweight and far-fetched analogies). Far better to take the road opened by Littré, who 'n'acceuille pas sans de grandes réserves cette idée d'évolution et cet idéal de pureté' (greets with the greatest reservations this idea of evolution and this ideal of purity).[125] We cannot, of course, tell from the various qualifications whether Sainte-Beuve had any clearly formulated sense of what was ultimately at stake in these divergences of view, but arguably he senses that something is awry in purity talk, however innocent its scholarly motivations.

In addition to lines of argument on the origins of French, there are his rare interventions in the intermittent debate inherited from the eighteenth century between the monogeneticists and the polygeneticists over the origins of language in general. The principal concern of the new philology in France was the comparative analysis of describable languages and their classification

[124] 'De ce qu'on a un talent polémique remarquable, ou même redoutable, et qui a fait ses preuves dans des circonstances déterminées, de ce qu'on a des coups de force et de vigueur précise dans la lutte, on ne possède pas pour cela les qualités complexes qui font l'historien et le critique' (Even when one has a remarkable, even a redoubtable polemical talent, which has been tested in determinate circumstances, even if one can deliver with precision certain forceful and vigorous blows when in conflict, one does not from that alone possess the complex qualities which make the historian and the critic) (*CL* v. 334).

[125] *Pr.L.* iii. 127–8.

into groups ('families'), not metaphysical conjecture about 'first' moments. But, as we have seen, earlier in the nineteenth century the origins debate was still active though in significantly different forms, above all Schegel's confused and confusing attempt to set what in the eighteenth century was a speculative philosophical question on a historical–empirical footing, designed, at least within the Indo-European family, to take us back, via Sanskrit, to some kind of originating moment. It is accordingly instructive to encounter, if only briefly, Sainte-Beuve on the question of origins. In the review of Bonald, he summarizes the respective eighteenth-century arguments over divine and human origins, straining to credit Bonald's defence of the former: 'il a défendu la philosophie spiritualiste par les armes les plus aiguisées et les plus habiles qu'elle ait maniées de nos jours' (he has defended spiritualist philosophy with the sharpest and most skilful weapons at its disposal in our own time), a case indeed so powerfully made as to remain as yet unanswered by the 'naturalists'.[126] But, if Sainte-Beuve gives credit to the force of an argument where he feels it is due, it does not follow that he himself in any way subscribed to it. He certainly had no time for the sacralizing of Sanskrit as the *Ursprache*, as can be seen from his remarks on the eighteenth-century linguist De Brosses and his book *Traité de la formation mécanique des langues* (1765). De Brosses turned to Sanskrit for the allegedly generative power of its roots; it seemed to him to be 'a very ancient and primitive language', its users 'the ancestral people *par excellence*'.[127] For Sainte-Beuve these hypotheses were pure chimeras:

> Son livre … participe de l'esprit du dix-huitième siècle, de son ambition, et un peu de sa chimère; avant de reconstruire idéalement les langues, et d'en rechercher à force d'analyse et de simplification conjecturale les racines primitives, il est plus humble, plus sûr de les étudier telles qu'elles nous sont données dans l'infinie variété de l'histoire, et de les comparer dans leurs diverses branches.
>
> His book … is steeped in the mentality of the eighteenth century, both its ambitions and to some extent its delusions; before embarking on an ideal reconstruction of languages and, by dint of analysis and speculative simplification, seeking primitive roots, the humbler and surer task is to study them such as they are available to us in the infinite variety of history, and to compare them across their diverse branches.[128]

De Brosses went by the eighteenth-century route of arguing from etymologies rather than, as later, from morphologies, but the reference to 'racines

[126] *CL* iv. 446.

[127] Raffaële Simone, 'The Early Modern Period', in *Renaissance and Early Modern Linguistics* (History of Linguistics, ed. Giulio Lepschy, 3; London, 1998), 213.

[128] *CL* vii. 100.

primitives' perhaps sends us allusively back to the metaphysician of the Root, Friedrich Schlegel.[129] Sainte-Beuve's abjuring of ideal reconstructions in favour of the historical description of actual languages could be Bréal speaking.[130]

All this suggests that Sainte-Beuve was, as an outsider, reasonably well informed as to the broad outlines of what had been taking place in the field of comparative philology, sufficiently so as to take a view, if not to forge a fully coherent position, on a number of the deeper questions of cultural politics it raised. Yet exactly how much he knew (did he, for example, actually read the translation of Bopp's *Comparative Grammar* or Renan's *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*?) remains unclear.[131] Nor is it obvious that, beyond the need to secure Latinity and French from attack by inflamed partisans of the new Germanism, that any of it mattered to him greatly. But what he did know about, and what mattered to him very much indeed—and did so, moreover, in terms directly connected with the wider defence of Latinity—was the convergence of the interests of comparative philology with those of classical philology on a literary issue that, in a different yet overlapping set of terms, had a history in France running from the late Renaissance through the seventeenth-century *querelle* and its prolonged

[129] De Brosses, however, departed from Schlegel (and was closer to Bopp) in maintaining that suffixes were there from the beginning, as integral aspects of the root, rather than as external add-ons (see Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics', p. xx).

[130] On the other hand, in his barbed remarks on the abbé de Pons's theories of the origins of language, Sainte-Beuve came remarkably close to the 'organicist' view: 'les langues sont nées de la race, et de tout ce qui affectait les sens à l'entour, du sol, du ciel, du paysage; toutes ces circonstances se sont réfléchies indirectement dans les mots, dans les sons qui les composent' (languages are born of race, and everything that affects the senses in our surroundings, from the soil, the sky, the landscape; all these conditions are indirectly reflected in the words, in the sounds that compose them). But the term 'race' here probably belongs more in a context drawing allusively on the historical sociology of Montesquieu and the linguistic speculations of Rousseau than on anything coming out of Schlegel and Schleicher. In the same article, Sainte-Beuve also strayed close to a 'Cratylist' view of the origins of words, dismissing the abbé de Pons's conventionalist stress on the 'arbitrary' nature of the sign (and pointing out that de Pons 'anticipates' Condillac): 'Il croit par là simplifier la question; il ne fait que mutiler l'homme … Tout cela est ingénieux, neuf à sa date, mais incomplet et faux par un côté. Ces riches rameaux des langues, venus et mûris sous tant de soleils, ont eu naturellement des fruits différents, et quelques-uns ont porté des fruits d'or' (He believes with this to simplify the question; all he does is mutilate man … It is all very clever, new for its time, but, from one point of view, incomplete and false. The rich branches of the various languages, emerging and ripening beneath so many different suns, have naturally borne different fruits, and some of them have borne golden fruits) (*CL* xiii. 155, 167–8). But this seems to be more an impressionistic literary judgement on the power and beauty of different languages than the invocation of a strictly linguistic theory.

[131] Since the *Revue des deux mondes* gave a great deal of space to summaries and discussions of the new philology, we can safely assume that Sainte-Beuve would have acquired much of his knowledge from this source (see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 99).

aftermath well into the nineteenth century. This is the issue to which, in many ways, the present chapter has been leading up to as the subject matter of the next—namely, that key modulation of the broader question of the meaning of the classic: the relative values for a given culture of Homer and Virgil.

# 5

# Homer or Virgil?

## I

The entries for Homer in the index of the *Lundis* are numerous; there are far fewer for Virgil. This may reflect the fact that for Sainte-Beuve, from within the history of his own literary culture, the case of Homer presented him with major complexities of interpretation and judgement, whereas, relatively speaking, that of Virgil did not, although this did not make him any less central to Sainte-Beuve's reflections on the classic; on the contrary, the relative straightforwardness of the 'question' of Virgil was in direct proportion to his absolute and irreducible centrality. Homer, however, occupied a far less uncomplicatedly assured position, such that Sainte-Beuve will repeatedly return to Homer as an issue that needs to be settled, once and for all, but that is in fact endlessly reopened. Sainte-Beuve was well versed in the tradition of Homeric editing, commentary, and translation from ancient times to the present. At various junctures, he will address the compilations of Pisistratus and the revisions of the Alexandrian scholars, especially Aristarchus; the French school of criticism from Scaliger to La Harpe, taking in along the way most of the more influential or noteworthy commentators (in addition to Scaliger and La Harpe at either end of the story, Guez de Balzac, Pellisson, Fleury, Terrasson, Le Bossu, Boileau, d'Aubignac, Rapin, Perrault, Fontenelle, Fénelon, Saint-Evremond, La Motte, Mme Dacier, Voltaire); the quasi-anthropological turn initiated by Vico and running through the Scottish 'Ossianists', the revisionist scholarship of Heyne and Wolf, to romantic literary theory; and, finally, mid-nineteenth-century reflection (including Arnold's lectures on translating Homer), along with an astonishing number of now long-forgotten nineteenth-century academic publications.

This immense body of work supplied essentially two contexts for interpretation and discussion. First, there was the seventeenth-century *querelle* and the divided views of the Ancients and the Moderns in the furious argument as to the status of Homer. Secondly, and closer to home, there was the 'Homer' produced by the new primitivism, emerging in the course of the eighteenth

century, to a large extent on the back of Vico's work, exacerbated by the 'bardic' enthusiasms of the Ossianist craze, given a scholarly grounding by the German classical scholars, and coming to a head with the stunning reversals of value effected by the German romantics, in which the philological revolution played a decisive part. In the Quarrel, the central issue was whether Homer was to be seen as a model worthy of 'emulation' (the position of the Ancients) or whether (the position of the Moderns) he was to be seen as the cultural relic of a bygone era, which was best treated as dead and buried. The difference of view turned formally on what otherwise might have seemed a purely technical issue: the question of authorship. Was 'Homer' a single individual, the creator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or was 'he' rather just a fictional proper name for what was in fact an anonymous, because collective, origin? The issue mattered in the *querelle* because both the Ancients and the Moderns shared an assumption: single authorship was one of the conditions and thus one of the criteria for determining whether or not a work of literature from the past had a claim on the present (as, precisely, a 'classic').[1]

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century primitivists turned this argument on its head.[2] Wolf's researches seemed to have established definitively that there was indeed no single author, at least for the original forms of the epics, but this was to be cause for celebration rather than for the derision of the seventeenth-century modernists. Vico's reflections on the culture of early Greece set the tone, although it was later to acquire a stridency that is nowhere found in Vico. The change is reflected in the shift from a neutral emphasis on cultural difference and relativity to a stress on hierarchy and superiority, with its inevitable spillover into cultural nationalism. With both the Schlegel brothers as particularly active participants, nearly the whole Jena school was assiduous in relating Homer to the Sanskrit, Persian, and Scandinavian epics, all in the name of 'anonymous genius' of the *Volk*. In France this view of Homer entered into circulation in the later eighteenth century and picked up steam in the early nineteenth century, although not without moments of

[1] See Noémi Hepp, *Homère en France au XVIIe siècle* (Turin, 1961–2; Paris, 1968).

[2] In this connection, Fumaroli's magisterial account of the *querelle* simply goes off the rails ('Les Abeilles et les araignées', in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq (Paris, 2001), 196–215). His own bias (defending the Ancients against the Moderns) leads him to assert a continuity running from Boileau and Dacier down to Vico and Wolf and through to the romantics. But, while it is true that all these praised Homer, they did so on fundamentally different grounds. The post-Vico school of thought claimed to find in Homer the beauties of the 'primitive', whereas for Boileau, Dacier, and their followers the claim to the greatness of Homer meant dissociating him from the 'barbaric' (this being, of course, the charge of the anti-Homer party of the Moderns). A thought-experiment here: try to imagine what a conversation on the subject of Homer between Boileau and Wolf might have looked like.

fierce resistance.[3] Mme de Staël gave it a certain currency in *De la littérature* and *Su la Maniera*; Hugo toyed with the thesis in the preface to *Les Orientales*; in his public lectures on Homer in 1831–2 (summarized in 1837 by Egger in the *Journal de l'instruction publique*) Fauriel endorsed the new scholarly trend, as did Parisot and Magnin (who wrote about Vico and Wolf on Homer in *Le Globe*).[4]

On the whole, Sainte-Beuve (who would certainly have been familiar with Magnin's remarks and appears also to have read Egger's translation of a portion of Wolf's text[5]) remained once again a detached observer of these debates, although his patience tended to snap before the anti-French assaults of the new barbarians. What counted for him was less the technical erudition than the question, and the grounds, of a literary judgement. What exactly was to be the place of Homer in the canon, and in particular his relevance to how the French might construe their own literary tradition (in this respect his reflections are but a belated nineteenth-century continuation of some of the terms of the *querelle*, in the face of a new set of challenges coming from the other side of the Rhine)? The primary judgement is unambiguous. In the review of Thiers's account of Waterloo he swerves back to Homer: 'Lisez Homère, le plus grand, le plus héroïque, le plus magnifique et aussi le plus naturel des poètes' (Read Homer, the greatest, the most heroic, the most magnificent and also the most natural of poets).[6] In the review of the *Greek Anthology* he asserts even more categorically: 'L'œuvre homérique n'en demeure pas moins à nos yeux le plus admirable produit de la poésie humaine' ( To our eyes, Homer's work remains notwithstanding the most admirable product of human poetry).[7] In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' he appears quite simply as 'le père du monde classique' (the father of the classical world), the foundation stone of the Temple of Taste: 'Homère, comme toujours et partout, y serait le premier, le plus semblable à un dieu' (Homer, as always and everywhere, would come first, the one who most resembles a god).[8]

[3] Towards the end of his career, Michel Bréal decided to throw his own hat into the ring over the Homer debate, summarizing and dismissing the whole tradition of Vico, Wolf, Herder, Schlegel, and Grimm as obscurantist ('la pensée est difficile à saisir' (the thought is difficult to grasp)) while vigorously asserting that in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* we see 'les preuves d'une intelligence consciente et maîtresse d'elle-même' (proofs of a conscious and self-mastering intelligence) (*Pour mieux connaître Homère* (Paris, 1909), pp. vi, 1).

[4] For details, see Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*: *Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 255, 262, 255, 331, 335. On Egger's summary of Fauriel's lectures, see Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), 124. On Mme de Staël and Homer, see Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London, 1995), 273.

[5] *NL* x. 57. [6] *NL* iii. 152. [7] *NL* vii. 46. [8] *CL* iii. 51.

But Sainte-Beuve also knew that his rhetoric masked major differences of view: the temporal adverb *toujours* simply repressed the facts of dissent (for instance, that of the seventeenth-century Moderns), while *partout* effectively homogenized the very different places and spaces, and hence the terms, within which Homer-worship took place. For the work of the modern classical scholars posed a difficulty where Homer's place in the Temple was concerned, and in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' it is revealed the very moment Homer's inclusion as the father of the classic is triumphantly declared. The roll-call of the great, it will be recalled, is essentially a list of proper names; possession of a singular individuality as creative origin of the literary work is a necessary condition of entry to the Pantheon. But, while Homer may be the father of us all, 'lui-même est encore moins certainement un individu simple et bien distinct que l'expression vaste et vivante d'une époque tout entière et d'une civilisation à demi barbare' (he himself is less certainly a single and distinct individual than the vast living expression of a whole epoch of semi-barbarian civilization). The Homer who enters the Pantheon is thus a retrospective construction, the product of a history of reception importing by back formation the interests of the present into the 'original' Homeric corpus: 'Pour en faire un classique proprement dit, il a fallu lui prêter après coup un dessein, un plan, des intentions littéraires, des qualités d'atticisme et d'urbanité, auxquelles il n'avait certes jamais songé dans le développement abondant de ses inspirations naturelles' (In order to make of him a classic properly speaking, it has been necessary to ascribe to him retrospectively a design, a plan, literary intentions, qualities of Atticism and urbanity, which, in the burgeoning development of his natural inspiration, he himself never dreamt of).[9] The idea of the Homeric classic as an effect of historical artifice must have been a hard concession to make, and even harder the reference to the 'semi-barbarous' reality lying behind the construction. It opened the gates wide to a flux of counter-views and counter-valuations that for most of his life Sainte-Beuve badly wanted to keep at bay.

We can gauge how important this was to Sainte-Beuve from his most protracted negotiation of the Homeric question, in the 1843 essay 'Homère'. Here, for the most part, he talks like one of the seventeenth-century Ancients. The initial move of the essay is to claim not only that Homer was the sole author of the Homeric epic (specifically of the *Iliad*, and, as we shall see, the restriction matters), but that Homer himself would have agreed with Sainte-Beuve and others (La Bruyère, moderate supporter of the seventeenth-century Ancients, is specifically cited) that sole authorship is indeed the price of the entry ticket to Parnassus. The *Iliad* has to be the product of

[9] *CL* iii. 46.

la main et le génie principal d'un seul. Le gouvernment de plusieurs n'est pas bon, a dit Homère lui-même; qu'il n'y ait qu'un maître et qu'un roi! Or cela est vrai pour tout poème. L'on n'a guère vu jusqu'à présent, a dit La Bruyère, un chef-d'oeuvre qui soit l'ouvrage de plusieurs; et il cite comme irrécusable exemple *l'Iliade*.

the hand and guiding genius of a single individual. Government by many is not good, Homer himself said; let there be but one master and one king! Now, that is true for all poetry. Up till now, La Bruyère maintained, we have rarely seen a masterpiece that is the work of several; and he cites the *Iliad* as an incontrovertible example.[10]

Sainte-Beuve's intervention in the long-running dispute over the question of authorship is therefore categorical, and he will return to it on several occasions in the course of the essay, most notably to pour scorn on the notion that 'Homer' is nothing but the later compilations of the Pisistratus corpus (this was equivalent, he maintained, to assuming that a work of genius could be written by a committee), and to claim that the use of the Venice scholia, published by Villoison in 1788, to peddle such a claim was an abuse of Villoison's work that he himself would never have sanctioned.[11]

The position adopted here on the controversial scholarly matter of Homeric authorship is but an assertion, and no attempt is made to disguise this. But it is more than a mere flourish supplanting reasoned argument. Rather the assumptions regarding authorship constitute a logical a priori without which the very idea of a great literary work is simply unthinkable. In this mood Sainte-Beuve is almost indistinguishable from the seventeenth-century Ancients, and it is from such assumptions that he can, again like his seventeenth-century ancestors, speak of Homer's world as 'la patrie première' (the original fatherland) and as 'naturellement la limite littéraire extrême à laquelle notre vue remonte dès l'enfance, et il occupe les sommets de toute cette pente graduée d'où le Beau nous est venu' (in the nature of things, the outermost literary limit to which, from childhood onwards, our gaze returns, and it occupies the summit of that graduated slope down which the Beautiful has come to us).[12] On the

[10] *PC* v. 327. In his earlier article on Fontanes (1838) Sainte-Beuve quotes Homer as saying 'Le pire des États, c'est l'État populaire' (The worst of States is the popular State) (*PL* 551). Questions of literary authorship are thus never far from questions of political authority.

[11] 'L'excellent et savant Villoison fut le premier bien étonné des résultats extrêmes qu'on tirait de sa découverte; il n'avait jamais prétendu à tant de bouleversements. Comme ces dignes Parlementaires qui, à cette même date de 1788, avaient donné le branle à la politique, il était un peu déconcerté et furieux d'avoir fourni les armes à une telle révolution sur Homère' (The excellent and learned Villoison was the first to be astonished by the extreme conclusions that were drawn from his discovery; he had never claimed to be overthrowing so many things. Like those worthy Parlementarians who, also in 1788, had given an impetus to politics, he was somewhat disconcerted and furious at having provided weapons for such a revolution on the topic of Homer) (*PC* v. 36). We note here how Sainte-Beuve cannot resist aligning scholarly and political 'revolution', both the enemies of good order.

[12] *PC* v. 33.

other hand, Sainte-Beuve was too scrupulous simply to bypass the researches of the later philologists. He may side with La Harpe (that last outpost of the Ancients) against Wolf,[13] but the latter nevertheless commands his respect and elsewhere he will prove more warmly disposed to Wolf's prolegomena.[14] The problem remained of how to square the notion of an originating genius whose work is governed by an 'inspiration personnelle et dirigeante' (a personal and directing inspiration)[15] with the conditions (of literacy, transmission, and so on) from which the Homeric epics allegedly emerged. How then to cut the Gordian knot? Sainte-Beuve's solution is a typical halfway house. Let us settle, he suggests, for the 'opinion moyenne' of his contemporary, the scholar Guigniaut, who maintained that, while the *Iliad* was composed by a single individual called Homer, the *Odyssey* was almost certainly the creation of one or more of the Homerids:

> Entre *l'Iliade* et *l'Odyssée*, si l'on découvre à toute force deux époques bien différentes et que n'ait pu embrasser une seule et même vie de poète, on pourrait toujours admettre le partage; *l'Iliade* serait d'Homère, *l'Odyssée* serait du premier et du plus grand des homérides.
>
> If between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* we discover, by dint of the weight of evidence, two quite distinct epochs, which could not have been encompassed by the same life of a single poet, we could always agree to a division: the *Iliad* would be by Homer, the *Odyssey* would be by the first and greatest of the Homerids.[16]

[13] 'La Harpe, sans y songer, répond d'avance, et par les arguments qui demeurent encore les plus victorieux, aux suppositions hardies de Wolf, à ses doutes ingénieux contre l'existence du poète et contre une certaine unité de l'œuvre' (Unawares, La Harpe replies pre-emptively, and with arguments that still win hands down, to the bold suppositions of Wolf, to the ingenious doubts as to the existence of the poet and a certain unity of the work) (*PC* v. 327).

[14] 'Wolf, quelque opinion qu'on se fasse en définitive sur ce grand procès, Wolf est plus qu'un érudit ingénieux et sagace: c'est un de ces hommes doués du génie critique comme l'Allemagne est coutumière d'en porter, et qui, d'une première vue neuve et profonde, créent une science, qui instituent une étude. Il renouvela d'emblée, en y entrant, toute l'étude d'Homère. Cette préface de 280 pages était une révolution' (Whatever definitive view one might take on this great dispute, Wolf is more than just a clever and shrewd scholar; he is one of those men endowed with critical genius that Germany is in the habit of producing and who, out of a new and profound initial insight, create a science that founds a whole new branch of study. From the moment he entered the field, he renewed the whole of Homeric studies. This preface of 280 pages is revolutionary) (*NL* x. 54). Here the objection is not to Wolf, but to the 'excesses' of some of his disciples (*NL* x. 57). While Joseph Bédier was right in including Sainte-Beuve among the handful of 'dissidents' vis-à-vis the 'primitivist' case, he was wrong in categorically stating that Sainte-Beuve's views were 'très hostiles aux théories de Wolf' (*Les Légendes épiques* (4 vols., Paris, 1926–9), iii. 231).

[15] *PC* v. 336.

[16] *PC* v. 338. The article on Grote's *History of Greece* proposes a similar compromise: while it is no longer possible to believe in a single Homer ('L'Homère unique, il est vrai, l'Homère simple, individuel, pareil à un Milton antérieur, a cessé d'être possible' (To be sure, the unique Homer, Homer the single individual, comparable to an early Milton, is no longer possible), it remains nevertheless the case that 'Le génie d'Homére n'est donc pas si morcelé et si épars qu'on l'a dit' (The genius of Homer is thus not as fragmented and scattered as has been claimed) (*NL* x. 67–8).

Sainte-Beuve's views on these questions add nothing of substance to the history of Homeric scholarship. They matter only because of the literary stakes in the scholarly debates, above all in terms of what the determining criteria of the 'classic' were to be. What Sainte-Beuve could not abide was the notion that the 'primitive' could be the ground of value. He was quite capable of understanding and sympathizing with the fact that 'Homer' might mean different things in different historical contexts. This even extended to admiration for that 'création moderne du sentiment antique' (the modern creation of feeling for the ancient) illustrated by Chateaubriand's version of Homer, which foregrounds 'les lignes grandioses et la sublimité primitive' (the grandiose lines and the primitive sublimity).[17] But his sense of historical relativities stopped short of endorsing the view that the *only* Homer that really mattered was the uncouth, illiterate bard through whom the collective voice of the *Volk* spoke.[18] Sainte-Beuve rounds on the evaluative tradition opened by Vico's theory in no uncertain terms:

On a beaucoup et très-éloquemment parlé de poésie *populaire*, de génie *instinctif*, d'épopée toute *spontanée* … On cite Vico et sa phrase spécieuse qui fait de la Grèce tout entière le poète qu'il ne faut plus réclamer ailleurs … Mais en création poétique, en imagination élevée, en talent de conception et d'expression, qu'est-ce à dire? Faut-il s'en remettre absolument et tout imputer au public, même au public d'alors, à la majorité des rhapsodes ou du moins à ce que j'ai appelé la Commission de Pisistrate?

People have spoken often and very eloquently of *popular* poetry, of *instinctive* genius and wholly *spontaneous* epic … They quote Vico and his specious formulation, which makes of Greece in its entirety the poet who must no longer be claimed elsewhere … But, where poetic creation is concerned, lofty imagination, talented conception, and execution, what does this mean? Must one refer and impute everything to the public, even the public of that time, to the majority of the rhapsodes or at least to what I have called Pisistratus' Committee?[19]

This is a view Sainte-Beuve would repeat, culminating, in the later *Nouveaux lundis*, with the stinging rebuke administered to the poet Ponsard's version of the Germanist take (his notorious charge that André Chénier 'avait reculé devant la brutalité d'Homère' (had recoiled before the brutality of Homer)):

la *brutalité* d'Homère, bon Dieu! Et cela dit presque en manière d'éloge! Si M. Ponsard avait vu la Grèce, il aurait su que le mot de *brutalité* n'existe que pour le cyclope dans

[17] *PC* v. 328.

[18] 'Rassurez-vous, messieurs, les grands hommes en tout genre,—et surtout dans l'ordre de l'esprit,—ne sont jamais des fous et des barbares' (Rest assured, gentlemen, the truly great in whatever genre—and above all in intellectual matters—are never madmen and barbarians) (*CL* xv. 367).

[19] *PC* v. 339–40.

le monde d'Homère, et qu'un pareil terme jure et crie, appliqué à ces beaux génies harmonieux qui, même sous leur forme primitive, sont tout le contraire du barbare.

the *brutality* of Homer, my God! And spoken as if it were a term of praise! If M. Ponsard had actually seen Greece, he would have known that the word *brutality* exists only for the Cyclops in Homer's world, and that such a term clashes dissonantly when applied to those beautifully harmonious geniuses that, even in their primitive form, are the exact opposite of the barbarian.[20]

Yet the full picture of Sainte-Beuve's involvement with the primitivist reading is more complex than this robust expression of disdain might imply. The slap-down administered to Ponsard occurs in an article published in 1868 (the year before his death) and thus may reasonably be construed as his last word on the subject. But a mere four years previously we encounter something quite different, in the review of the recently translated *Greek Anthology*. Although scrupulously detailed, this was in many ways just an opportunity for the series of more general reflections that frame it at either end, the drift of which is caught by the review's subtitle, 'De la question des anciens et des modernes'. In many ways this text is a swansong and a testament, standing as Sainte-Beuve's most eloquent defence of the virtues of the Antique. By the latter he means essentially ancient Greece and specifically Homer, and for once cedes to the Greeks the privilege otherwise granted to Rome and Latinity: 'J'ai, en tout ceci, plus particulièrement en vue les Grecs, qui furent la grande source originale et le premier modèle du beau littéraire dont les Latins ne sont que la seconde épreuve, fort belle encore, mais retouchée' (In all this, I have in mind especially the Greeks, who were the great original source and the first model of literary beauty, of which the Latins are but the second version, still very beautiful but touched up).[21] The historical premiss of the essay is hard-headedly realistic: the gulf between the Moderns and the Ancients is now so massive as to be almost unbridgeable. At the same time, Sainte-Beuve contemplates, with a melancholy foreboding verging at times on outright panic, the catastrophic prospect of the definitive loss of antiquity to modernity.[22] This is not, however, a rerun of the seventeenth-century *querelle*.

[20] *NL* xii. 364–5. See also the article on Barthélemy: 'Si l'on nous faisait autrefois de l'ancienne Grèce une image trop amollie et trop riante, ne la fait-on pas trop dure et trop sauvage aujourd'hui?' (If previously we were fed an excessively softened and cheerful image of ancient Greece, are we not today given a version that is too hard and too savage?) (*CL* vii. 216).

[21] *NL* vii. 30.

[22] 'Il m'est échappé de dire, il y a quelque temps, en parlant de la Grèce … que je craignais fort que, dans cette lutte engagée avec l'esprit moderne, et qui, ouvertement ou sourdement, se continue, les Anciens ne perdissent tout ou tard, sinon toute la bataille, du moins une partie et une aile de cette bataille. Cette parole de fâcheux augure m'a été reprochée par des amis bienveillants, et ils ont cru voir de ma part un signe de faiblesse. Dieu m'est témoin pourtant que c'est bien une crainte que j'exprimais, et non une opinion tant soit peu favorable à une telle issue,

In the conditions of 'modernity', it can no longer be a question of either imitating or competing with the Ancients, but rather of preserving a memory of what is otherwise at risk of disappearing into oblivion. The tone is soberly measured, but with also more than a hint of desperation, which may perhaps explain the strange turn that its argument will eventually take. Sainte-Beuve doffs his hat politely but distantly to Véron's study, whose title *Du Progrès intellectuel dans l'Humanité. Supériorité des Arts modernes sur les Arts anciens* clearly places him as a kind of latter-day Perrault. But then, in an abrupt switch of perspective, we find ourselves in a counter-narrative. It is not the one we might have expected, a replay of the gravely magisterial voice of Boileau pleading reverence for the Ancients. It is rather a version of the 'Aryanist' narrative as mediated by the poetic-mystical musings of Louis Ménard and the philological endeavours of Émile Egger.[23]

Given Sainte-Beuve's well-documented suspicion of the new Germanist fashions, this, to put it mildly, is not the company in which one would have predicted finding him. Ménard is nevertheless commended for his largeness of view:

> Mais un autre écrivain des mêmes générations, Louis Ménard, a de plus hautes visées et une ambition plus originale: c'est proprement l'adversaire de M. Eugène Véron; lui, il a placé hardiment son idéal au berceau même de la Grèce, à l'époque printanière de cet épanouissement mythologique que les philosophes, avant et après Socrate, ont raillé, méconnu, blasphémé ou interprété à contre-sens.
>
> But another writer of this same generation, Louis Ménard, aims higher, equipped with a more original ambition: he is properly speaking M. Eugène Véron's adversary; he himself has boldly located his ideal in the cradle of Greece, in this springtime of mythological flowering that the philosophers, before and after Socrates, have mocked, failed to recognize, blasphemed, or interpreted the wrong way.

ni l'ombre d'un assentiment. Mais je crois, en effet, que les choses humaines sont emportées de plus en plus dans un courant qui les sépare à jamais, et par tout un abîme, du goût et de l'esprit littéraire de l'Antiquité, et qu'il n'y aura dans l'avenir qu'une rare élite à qui il sera donné de conserver la tradition intacte, de préserver le feu sacré et le flambeau' (Some time ago, when speaking of Greece, I let slip … my considerable fear that, in the struggle against the modern spirit, a struggle that openly or silently still continues, the Ancients would lose sooner or later, if not the whole battle, then one part and one branch of it. Some well-meaning friends reproached me for this unhappy prophecy and appeared to have detected in it a sign of weakness on my part. But God will bear witness that it was a fear I was expressing, not an opinion somewhat favouring a given outcome nor even the faintest assent. But I do indeed believe that human affairs are increasingly caught in a current separating them forever, across an abyss, from the taste and literary spirit of Antiquity, and that in the future there will be but a rare elite to which will redound the task of preserving the tradition intact, preserving the sacred flame and torch) (*NL* vii. 1–2).

[23] On Ménard and ancient Greece, see Henri Peyre, *Louis Ménard (1822–1901)* (New Haven, 1932).

Ménard's argument, as summarized and illustrated (through lengthy quotation) by Sainte-Beuve, has three salient features: first, a theory of 'la race aryenne venue du haut berceau de l'Asie', secondly, a categorical separation of the Aryan family of languages and cultures from the Egyptian and the Semitic (defined variously as 'la terre des monstres' (the land of monsters) and 'fléchissant de respect et de superstitieuse terreur' (bowing respectfully in superstitious terror)); thirdly, a claim that ancient Greece was one of the more gorgeous 'branches' ('le rameau d'or') of the original Indic-Sanskrit source. The Greeks and their early culture (whose flower will be the Homeric epic) belong, in the words of Ménard quoted by Sainte-Beuve, to 'la race pure des Aryas' (the pure race of the Aryas).[24]

These are astonishing terms in which to encounter Sainte-Beuve thinking about antiquity. While we catch a hint of it in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' when Sainte-Beuve aligns Homer with the Sanskrit and Persian epics, the 1864 text goes a great deal further in spelling out the implications of these family resemblances. Nevertheless, it needs to be handled with care. Sainte-Beuve does not actually commit himself to the theses he describes. Admiring the skill with which an argument is made is not the same as subscribing to it. Nor is it a declaration of full-blooded primitivism.[25] Sainte-Beuve's early Greek is not the Dionysian beast but the cheerful, unselfconscious Greek of an earlier phase of European Hellenism, Greece as the happy childhood of mankind, whose 'instinctive' mode of being is marked above all by what Sainte-Beuve calls 'la grâce' (in Schiller's terms, the irrecoverable culture of the Naïve). It is nevertheless odd to find Sainte-Beuve, if but momentarily and in guardedly selective terms, a trifle spellbound by the Ménard scenario. In any case, a year later, in his 1865 review of the translation of Grote's *History of Greece*, the spell is broken. Grote is to be congratulated, writes Sainte-Beuve, for having consigned the mytho-mystic narrative of Greek origins to the wastepaper basket. This is not how scientifically responsible history is to be written. The old stories and legends may have issued from 'la même source que les

[24] *NL* vii. 41–3. It is also here that Sainte-Beuve pays homage to Arnold's lectures on Homer: 'Jamais on n'a mieux senti ni mieux marqué le mouvement et le large courant naturel et facile du discours ou fleuve homérique que ne l'a fait M. Arnold' (No one has ever surpassed M. Arnold in sensing and marking the natural and easy flow and breadth of the Homeric discourse or river) (vii. 38). This was a generous tribute given Arnold's response to the letter Sainte-Beuve sent him in which he staked the claim for the pre-eminence of Virgil (*Corr. gén.* ix. 473–4). Arnold's reply came in 'The Modern Element in Modern Literature', of which Kermode rightly observes: 'He was determined to disagree with Sainte-Beuve, and determined not to accept Virgil as the emblem of the classic and of a universal Latin culture' (*The Classic* (London, 1975), 18).

[25] It would be interesting to have had Sainte-Beuve's views on the wilfully harsh tonalities of the translation by Ménard's contemporary and spiritual brother Leconte de Lisle. He was favourably disposed to Leconte de Lisle's poetry (*NL* ii. 249–50).

plus antiques Védas' (the same source as the most ancient Vedas), but such questions are 'questions obscures, sans doute insolubles' (obscure questions, doubtless insoluble), a zone of speculative fancy 'où les esprits nets et clairs, ceux qui "prennent pour règle l'évidence", les esprits de la lignée de Locke, de la famille des Gibbon, des Hallam, ne sauraient s'assurer d'un seul endroit guéable ni trouver où poser le pied' (where clear and precise minds, those that 'take evidence as the basic rule', minds in the tradition of Locke, in the family of the Gibbons, the Hallams, which would not guarantee a single place that would enable us to bridge these waters or provide firm footing).[26] One senses the sheer relief afforded by this retreat into the sanctuary of healthy English empiricism, and a few pages on it is made explicit, this time in connection with Homer. Grote's historiography is the requisite antidote to excessive intake of the German stuff, supplying for Sainte-Beuve a certain peace of mind in the midst of such a dark and troubling scholarly landscape:

> Appliquant son procédé au plus grand événement de ces âges mythiques et héroiques, à la guerre de Troie, M. Grote envisage sous cet aspect les poèmes homériques, l'*Iliade* et l'*Odyssée*, et il arrive à des conclusions qui, par leur modération et leur plausibilité, m'ont beaucoup plu et m'ont paru apporter une certaine paix, une médiation conciliante, dans l'espèce de trouble et de partage où ont dû nous laisser en France les dernières guerres homériques engagées depuis plus de cinquante ans entre les savants d'outre-Rhin.
>
> Applying his procedure to the greatest event of these heroic and mythological ages, the Trojan War, M. Grote considers the Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, from this point of view, and arrives at conclusions that, in their moderation and plausibility, have pleased me greatly and that have seemed to supply me with a certain peace of mind, a conciliating mediation, in the state of turmoil and division to which in France we have been forcibly placed by the latest Homeric wars prosecuted in the last fifty years amongst the scholars across the Rhine.[27]

Yet, if this appears to dispatch once and for all the 'Aryanist' temptation, it did not entirely clear the decks. The review of Grote was after all also the text in which Sainte-Beuve effectively declared Wolf to be the winner of the scholarly argument (albeit not taking Wolf's victory as a licence for the interpretive gambits of some of his disciples).[28] This meant that the characterization (as distinct from the celebration) of Homer as 'primitive' was not something that could be dismissed out of hand. The judicious 'middle' position outlined in 'Homère' and repeated with a more Wolfian inflection in the article on Grote left Sainte-Beuve somewhat stranded between the opposing parties to the

[26] *NL* x. 49.

[27] *NL* x. 51. This is one of the few occasions in Sainte-Beuve's writings when scholarly dispute is represented as a 'war'.

[28] *NL* x. 54–7.

original seventeenth-century *querelle*. The fury of the debate over Homer in the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century masked a (highly limited) degree of common ground. The Ancients of course defended Homer as the father of poetry, most notably Boileau in the *Réflexions sur Longin*, and then even more vociferously in the writings of his disciple Anne Dacier, which in turn generated the flurry of exchanges on both sides of the divide (Dacier's principal adversary being La Motte). But only the most rigid of the seventeenth-century Ancients viewed Homer as the acme of perfection (as we have already noted, for Sainte-Beuve Boileau was 'bien plus latin que grec'). Le Bossu insisted that the Homeric epic furnished the definitive blueprint for the rules and procedures of epic in general and for all time, but Sainte-Beuve's passing reference to Le Bossu's views as 'superstitious' leaves us in no doubt that his allegiances do not lie here. Many of the Ancients took a more nuanced view, specifically on the question of the extent to which Homer could be deemed compatible with the canons of 'taste' (an equivocation seized on by the Moderns to assert that Homer was indeed a 'primitive' and for that reason to fetishize him in the manner of Le Bossu was simply a literary and historical absurdity).[29]

This was a view of Homer that clearly troubled Sainte-Beuve, and that, despite his many assertions to the contrary, he could never quite shake off. Perhaps therefore retaining a 'memory' of this face of antiquity was not quite so straightforward. Homer belongs to an age so remote that it is not only ultimately impenetrable (the illusion of 'positive' scholarship that it could once and for all scientifically dispel all the mysteries), but also in some radical way severed from 'our' culture. Perhaps there was a touch of the 'barbarian' to Homer after all, and, as we saw from the review of *Salammbô*, Sainte-Beuve was not particularly receptive to the implications of Flaubert's reply: 'rien de plus compliqué qu'un Barbare'. This is not the image of Homer he liked to contemplate for long, and in both 'Homère' and elsewhere he leant over backwards to avoid it. In the 1843 essay he notes that Aristarchus was charged with having 'softened ('adouci') Homer's 'original', but immediately springs to his defence with the argument that Aristarchus' rationalization of the text was consistent with the prevailing moral atmosphere of Homer's world, over which reigns 'une haute et sérieuse bienséance' (a lofty and serious decorum).[30] The term *bienséance* in Sainte-Beuve's criticism nearly always bears a variety of meanings, but it of course immediately resonates back into the idiom of

[29] See Robert Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on Western Thought: AD 1650–1870* (Cambridge, 1979), 11.

[30] *PC* v. 352.

seventeenth-century critical discourse, and the position it marks carries over into his judgements of French efforts to bring Homer before the reading public.

Fénelon's reworking in *Télémaque* always gets a good billing for its lightness and delicacy of touch: 'Fénelon en avait goûté et rendu surtout les grâces simples et l'attique negligence' (Fénelon had tasted of it and rendered above all its simple graces and Attic nonchalance).[31] Equally revealing are Sainte-Beuve's observations on the intrepid Mme Dacier. While casting a sceptical eye over her role as a fanatical latecomer to the *querelle* (she was an ardent partisan of Boileau and unflinching supporter of the single-author thesis), and aligning her with Le Bossu ('l'admiration un peu superstitieuse de madame Dacier et du Père Le Bossu sur le plan exact et le but de l'*Iliade*' (the slightly superstitious admiration of Mme Dacier and old Le Bossu for the exact plan and aim of the *Iliad*)), he preferred her translation to the preposterously mannered version of her arch-enemy, La Motte; where the latter succeeded in making Homer sound like a seventeenth-century *précieux*,[32] Madame Dacier sought to reproduce something of the noble 'simplicity' of Homer's style. But even the loyal Dacier sometimes erred in the direction of confusing the simple with the vulgar: in the articles devoted to her, Sainte-Beuve highlighted the residual presence in 'son style noble de ces expressions un peu basses' (in her style of those slightly vulgar expressions) as a lapse of taste, not only anachronistic (what conceivable translation could avoid that trap?) but the wrong kind of anachronism because excessively crude.[33]

Yet the worry about the cultural values embodied by the Homeric epic continued to trouble him. If in the 1843 essay what he calls 'les mœurs homériques' are governed by 'un je ne sais quoi de grande morale, une impulsion élevée de sentiments et de langue' (a certain something of lofty morality, an elevated thrust of feeling and language),[34] in some of his subsequent remarks the impressionistic 'je ne sais quoi' becomes hard to translate into more precise analytical terms. Sainte-Beuve will continue to excoriate the

[31] *PC* v. 328. See also the article on Ronsard: 'C'est à Fénelon qu'il en faut venir pour posséder l'esprit familier et adouci d'Homère, tout ce qui pouvait alors se naturaliser de lui en France et y être à l'usage de chacun dans une prose suave et persuasive' (It is to Fénelon that we must turn to take possession of the intimate and mellow spirit of Homer, everything about him that has a natural home in France, and placed at the disposal of all in a suave and persuasive prose) (*CL* xii. 80). On Fénelon's version of Homer, see Kirsti Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic (1688–1798)* (Cambridge, 1979), 27.

[32] 'un Homère abrégé, corrigé et perfectionné à la mode des Parisiens raisonneurs de l'an 1714, Homère tel qu'il aurait dû être s'il avait eu l'honneur de vivre aux dernières années du règne de Louis-le-Grand' (a Homer abbreviated, revised, and perfected in the fashion of thinking Parisians of the year 1714, Homer as he ought to have been if he had had the honour of living in the last years of the reign of Louis-the-Great) (*CL* xiii. 151).

[33] *CL* ix. 491. [34] *PC* v. 353.

'brutalizing' version of Homer, but as early as 1852, in the *causerie* devoted to the abbé Barthélemy's *Voyage en Anacharsis*, he is already more circumspect. The new image of ancient Greece ('trop dure et trop sauvage' (too rough and too savage)) is in many ways a compensation for the previous one ('trop amollie et trop riante' (too softened and too cheerful)), of which Barthélemy's huge salon success was a prime case in point. The latter was to have Greece on the cheap, and at the cost of abolishing the immense distance, both historical and cultural, separating us from its world:

> Il reste à savoir pourtant si les pensées des Grecs, exprimées par eux et traduites sous nos yeux sans explication préalable, sont suffisamment à notre usage. On aurait voulu que … Barthélemy fît mieux sentir les différences tranchées qu'elles (les anciennes républiques) ont avec la société moderne, l'esclavage qui en était le fondement, l'oppression des races vaincues, les droits de citoyen exclusivement réservés à un petit nombre d'habitants, là même où il semble que la multitude domine.
>
> It remains to be determined nevertheless whether the thoughts of the Greeks, as expressed by them and translated for our eyes without prior explication, are sufficiently close to our own usages. One would have wished for Barthélemy to have made more of the sharp differences between the ancient republics and modern society, the foundation of the former on slavery, the oppression of conquered races, rights of citizenship exclusively reserved for a small minority of inhabitants in precisely the place where in theory the multitude reigns.[35]

This is starting to sound more like Constant on the Greeks than either Boileau or Ménard, and the conclusion drawn is a forceful statement of cultural incommensurabilities that would not be out of place in *Sur la liberté des anciens et des modernes*: 'La conclusion à tirer pour moi … c'est qu'on ne transporte pas une littérature dans une autre, ni le génie d'une race et d'une langue dans le génie d'un peuple différent' (The conclusion I draw … is that one does not transport a given literature into another, nor the genius of one race and language into the genius of a different people).[36]

## II

Moreover hovering in the wings, there is another figure waiting to emerge centre-stage—namely, Virgil, most especially in the lectures given at the Collège de France subsequently published as *Étude sur Virgile*. If Sainte-Beuve constantly revisits the question of Homer—in his discussions of the

[35] *CL* vii. 209–10. [36] *CL* vii. 218.

seventeenth-century *querelle*, the work of the classical and comparative philologists, the literary thought of the romantics, the value of the classics for contemporary education in the schools and universities—it is because the question amounted to something of an obsession, propelled, like most obsessions, by an undertow of anxiety (whence the range of emotional registers in the language of discussion—awestruck, impatient, perplexed; nerves are being touched). On Virgil there is a quite different register, a kind of uniform placidity. Virgil is simply there, also overpoweringly great, but approachable with the kind of relaxed familiarity reserved for someone who is a natural member of the family ('Virgile est plus à notre portée, dans nos données à tous et selon nos goûts' (Virgil is more within our reach, in our collective presuppositions and tastes)[37]). If with Homer Sainte-Beuve is at times fretfully uneasy, obliged to rehash the problems that will not go away, with Virgil he is unbreakably serene. In this he was at one with a tradition of critical thought in France from the sixteenth century onwards. A recurring theme from Scaliger through to the late eighteenth century was the polarization of the debate about the classic of antiquity around the choice: Homer *or* Virgil?[38] Sainte-Beuve himself would never have seen it as an either/or choice, although on just one occasion—unsurprisingly in the article on Firdawsi—he came close to a set of priorities that appeared to concede the primitivists' case.[39] But the straitjacket of an imposed choice is what he wanted at all costs to avoid. It was always Homer *and* Virgil. In his recension of the history of French critical taste in *Étude sur Virgile*, he makes plain that the primacy conventionally granted to Virgil has entailed a serious injustice to the reputation of Homer; in particular he denounces Scaliger's polemical divinization of Virgil and corresponding immolation of Homer in no uncertain terms ('Je ne sais d'exemple d'un plus mauvais goût joint à plus de savoir' (I know of no example of such bad taste joined to so much learning)[40]), and draws the following 'lesson in taste':

[37] *NL* ii. 278.

[38] For a detailed account, see Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius.*

[39] 'La véritable poésie épique, pour être vivante, a besoin de reposer sur des racines populaires et d'y puiser sa sève, sans quoi elle ne produit que des œuvres de cabinet, belles peut-être, mais toujours un peu froides. Virgile n'a réussi qu'à produire une épopée de cette dernière espèce: Homère nous offre le modèle accompli de la première' (In order to be a living thing, true epic poetry needs to be based in popular roots and to draw on their sap, without which it yields only studious works, beautiful perhaps, but always a little cold. Virgil succeeeded only in producing an epic of this type: Homer offers us the fully accomplished model of the first type) (*CL* i. 341).

[40] *Étude sur Virgile* (Paris, 1857), 320. In the 1829 article on Boileau, Sainte-Beuve claims of both Boileau and Malherbe that 'ils se tiennent aux Romains de préférence aux Grecs; et le siècle d'Auguste leur présente au premier aspect le type absolu du beau' (they stick to the Romans in preference to the Greeks; and for them the age of Augustus presents at first sight the absolute type of beauty) (*PL* 10). Here the claim is intended as a reproach.

La leçon du goût qu'on en peut tirer, je crois l'avoir déjà dit, ce n'est pas de moins admirer Homère ni Virgile, mais de les mieux admirer chacun dans son ordre et à son âge de civilisation. En France, on n'a pas toujours su être juste; issus en grande partie des Latins, nous avons hérité de leur manière de faire, de leurs préférences comme de quelques-uns de leurs mérites et de leurs qualités. En un mot, on s'est donné aisément la préférence à soi-même dans la personne des Latins.

The lesson in good taste that one can draw from this—I believe I have already stated it—is not to admire less either Homer or Virgil, but to admire each better in accordance with their respective orders and phase of civilization. In France we have not always known how to be just; stemming in large part from the Latins, we have inherited their way of doing things, their preferences along with some of their merits and qualities. In a word, it has been all too easy to prefer ourselves through the figure of the Latins.[41]

It is perhaps for these reasons—as part of the campaign to escape the limitations of 'la théorie latine'—that, in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', Sainte-Beuve places Virgil not on the summit with Homer, but 'sur la pente la plus accessible' (on the most accessible slope), holding with Menander, Tibullus, Terence, and Fénelon 'des entretiens d'un grand charme et d'un enchantement sacré' (conversations of great charm and holy enchantment).[42] But, if the traditional preference for Virgil houses a Gallo-centric blindspot, the preference is neither an arbitrary accident of taste nor an irrational aberration. Where Homer, by virtue of his ultimately unanalysable universality, belongs to the world (the world's classics), Virgil is 'our' classic, directly and crucially relevant to both the historical formation and the reflexive understanding of 'Frenchness'. Homer is incomparable, but—this is one of the reasons why he is beyond

[41] *Étude sur Virgile*, 316. See also the article on Ronsard: 'Ici je ne peux m'empêcher de remarquer combien l'influence d'Homère, de ce grand poète naturel, fut petite dans notre littérature, ou, pour parler plus exactement, elle fut absente … n'y a-t-il pas une conclusion générale à tirer sur le caractère presque exclusivement latin de notre littérature' (Here I cannot prevent myself observing just how small the influence of Homer, of this great natural poet, on our literature was or, to be more exact, just how absent it was … is there not there a general conclusion to be drawn as to the almost exclusively Latin character of our literature?) (*CL* xii. 78).

[42] *CL* iii. 52. See also the article on Racine in *Portraits littéraires*: 'Les poètes primitifs, fondateurs, originaux sans mélange, nés d'eux-mêmes et fils de leurs œuvres, Homère, Pindare, Eschyle, Dante et Shakespeare, sont quelquefois sacrifiés, préférés le plus souvent, toujours opposés aux génies studieux, polis, dociles, essentiellement éducables et perfectibles, des époques moyennes. Horace, Virgile, le Tasse, sont les chefs les plus brillants de cette famille secondaire, réputée, et avec raison, inférieure à son aînée, mais d'ordinaire mieux comprise de tous, plus accessible et plus chère' ( The primitive, founding poets, unadulteratedly original, self-generating and their own offspring, Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Dante, and Shakespeare, are sometimes sacrificed, more often preferred, always opposed to the studious, polished, docile geniuses, the essentially educable and perfectible ones, of average periods. Horace, Virgil, Tasso are the most brilliant heads of this secondary family, reputed, rightly, to be inferior to their older brother, but ordinarily better understood, more accessible, and dearer to us) (*PL* 49–50).

compare—he is not one of us.[43] For 'us' ('nos classiques', in the term of 'De la tradition'), Virgil is 'le poète de la Latinité tout entière'; he is foundational. If heritage and legacy are to be the defining issues in thinking about the classic, then Virgil, for France and French literature, is indeed the key figure, the presiding spirit over what, above all in the seventeenth century, will count as *the* Classic. On this point Sainte-Beuve finds himself not only in near-perfect agreement with his predecessors but also under an obligation to re-emphasize it to his audience at the Collège, as if on a pedagogical mission to reaffirm the soil from which France has sprung: ('Et moi aussi, à mon tour, j'aimerai à me considérer à quelque degré un prêtre de Virgile' (And I myself, in turn, would like to consider myself to some extent a priest of Virgile)).[44]

Here, then, in one of Sainte-Beuve's more magnificently eloquent passages, is the second, more heartfelt, lesson to be drawn from the Homer/Virgil comparison:

Virgile, depuis l'heure où il parut, a été le poète de la Latinité tout entière. Il a donné une nouvelle forme du goût, aux passions, à la sensibilité; il a deviné, à une heure décisive du monde, ce qu'aimerait l'avenir. S'il a trop dispensé, et les modernes et les Romains déjà, de l'antique et divin Homère, c'est qu'il y a dans les choses une nécessité fatale et une loi de succession et de renouvellement; c'est qu'on ne remonte pas avec une égale facilité le cours des âges et des fleuves nés de sommets différents; c'est que l'Ida aux mille sources est bien loin, et que l'Ithaque est bien petite; c'est que Rome est Rome, et que tous les peuples issus d'elle en ont gardé toujours à leur horizon une vue présente, et ont un reste de sang latin jusque dans leurs veines. Virgile a été le poète du Capitole. Il n'a pas cessé dans les âges les plus dévastés et les plus durs, d'apparaître comme une puissante et magique personnification de je ne sais quel charme regretté et non tout à fait perdu; il n'a pas cessé d'être l'enchanteur Virgile. L'hiver de la barbarie passé, il a présidé aussitôt aux nouvelles aurores … Aujourd'hui, il est, avec Horace, de ceux dont on ne se sépare plus, de ceux qu'on emporterait comme des Pénates, s'il fallait absolument quitter le reste de la cité latine et de l'antique patrie. Horace, c'est l'ami; Virgile, c'est le maître et l'ami encore.

From the moment of his appearance, Virgil has been the poet of the entire Latin world. He supplied a new form of taste to the passions, to sensibility; he divined, at a decisive moment of world history, the preferences of the future. If he has already allowed both the Moderns and indeed the Romans to dispense excessively with the ancient and divine Homer, this is because there is in the run of things a fatal necessity and a law of succession and renewal; it is because one does not travel with equal facility back down the flow of ages and rivers originating on different mountain tops; it is because the Ida of a thousand sources is very distant and Ithaca very small; it is because Rome is Rome, and because all the peoples who have issued from Rome have retained

[43] There is, therefore, something paradoxical to the article 'Homère' appearing in *Portraits contemporains*. Whatever his stature, Homer is not our 'contemporary' in the way that Virgil is.

[44] *Étude sur Virgile*, 27.

something of her on their present horizons, and have in their veins a remnant of Latin blood. Virgil was the poet of the Capitol. He has not ceased, even in the harshest and most devastated times, to appear as a powerful and magical personification of an unnameable charm, regretted and never entirely lost; he has never ceased to be Virgil the enchanter. With the winter of barbarism over, he presided immediately over the arrival of a new dawn … Today he is, with Horace, of the company one never forsakes, one of those one would carry off as household gods if it were absolutely necessary to quit the rest of the Latin city and ancient fatherland. Horace is the friend; Virgil is the master and still the friend.[45]

The claim to a special affiliation with Virgil thus rests on a double attribution: the company of Virgil comprises the closeness of a friend as well as the authority of a master.[46] The two qualities or forms of relationship are interdependent in so far as the Virgilian epic (and also the Virgilian pastoral[47]) exemplify a new kind of 'civility', or what Sainte-Beuve will constantly refer to as the cultural values of *urbanité* ('ce mot tout romain' (that wholly Roman word) as against 'les esprits durs, rustiques, sauvages et fanatiques' (rough, rustic, savage, and fanatical minds)).[48] In this frame, Virgil is the epic poet of civilization, Homer the epic poet of barbarism. 'Civilization' meant several things. In the first place, it meant the polished and the polite, analogous to the model of literary 'taste' and 'decorum' Sainte-Beuve found in the seventeenth century (the analogy will be made explicit: 'la noble poésie selon le siècle d'Auguste, qui est assez semblable en cela au siècle de Louis XIV' (the noble poetry of the age of Augustus, which, in that respect, somewhat resembles the age of Louis XIV)[49]). These were the terms of the tradition of French commentary itself, to which Sainte-Beuve devotes the last chapter of *Étude sur Virgile*. This, however, is little more than a summary, appropriate perhaps to the context of the academic lecture hall. More interesting is the earlier chapter, where, in the course of a discussion of the respective forms of figurative language in Homer and Virgil (Homer's concrete and immediate, Virgil's more sophisticated and abstract), Sainte-Beuve cites the argument of Saint-Evremond (one of the Moderns) in 'Sur les anciens'.[50] Virgil 'imitates' Homer 'mais il l'a imité en faisant non pas moins bien, mais *plus doux*' (but he imitated him not by doing less well, but by being *more gentle*). And it is Saint-Evremond who draws the relevant conclusion where the history of French literary taste is concerned: 'Saint-Evremond, parlant de la différence de génie chez les Anciens et les

[45] Ibid. 36–7.

[46] 'Virgile est un doux nom, cher à l'oreille et au cœur de tous' (Virgil is a sweet name, dear to the ear and the heart of all) (*NL* xi. 180).

[47] See 'Le Poème des champs' (*NL* ii. 278).

[48] *CL* iii. 68–9.

[49] *Étude sur Virgile*, 233.

[50] Saint-Evremond, *Œuvres en prose* (4 vols.; Paris, 1962–9), ii. 348–59.

Modernes, s'attache à montrer, selon le goût et les mœurs de la société de son temps, que la *discrétion* doit désormais présider aux comparaisons poétiques' (Saint-Evremond, on the subject of the different kinds of genius characteristic of the Ancients and the Moderns, is bent on showing, relative to the taste and customs of the society of his own time, that *discretion* is henceforth to preside over poetic comparisons). Sainte-Beuve's own conclusion is that this view did not merely reflect a seventeenth-century prejudice, but that it was continuous with the manner of the Roman poets themselves during the reign of Augustus: 'Or, ce que je dis là des Français de notre connaissance était déjà vrai jusqu'à un certain point des Romains du temps d'Auguste et du monde de Mécènes.—Mécènes n'est pas si loin, pour le goût (comme pour la philosophie) de Saint-Evremond' (Now, what I maintain there in respect of the French I am acquainted with was already true to some extent of the Romans in Augustus' time and of the world of Maecenas … In the matter of taste (as in that of philosophy), Maecenas is not very far from Saint-Evremond).[51]

*Plus doux*, however, meant more than a code of literary good manners. Virgil 'softens' the discourse of epic in a way that inaugurates a whole new form of modern sensibility ('Mais la sensibilité sous sa forme déjà moderne … elle est surtout chez Virgile' (But what is already a modern form of sensibility … is to be found above all in Virgil)).[52] In particular, 'soft' designates the virtues of tenderness, compassion, and piety that incorporate or anticipate the civilizing value system of Christianity. In the second chapter of *Étude sur Virgile* Sainte-Beuve digresses from his main topic (the *Aeneid*) to consider the 'prophetic' moment in the Fourth Eclogue (the prophecy of the coming of Augustus), to which he appends the comment: 'La venue même du Christ n'a rien qui étonne quand on a lu Virgile' (The coming of Christ itself carries no surprises when one has read Virgil).[53] This strikes an echo with another very famous intervention, T. S. Eliot's lecture 'What is a Classic?', in which Virgil joins with Dante as the quintessential classics of European Christendom. I shall have more to say of the Sainte-Beuve/Eliot comparison in a subsequent chapter. There are many important differences. In respect of the alleged link with Christianity, Eliot's narrative is frankly teleological; Virgil 'leads' to Dante ('he led Europe towards the Christian culture which he would never know'[54]), as part of 'the unique position in our history of the Roman Empire and the Latin language: a position that may be said to conform to its *destiny*',[55] a story

[51] *Étude sur Virgile*, 243–4 (emphasis in original).
[52] Ibid. 112–13. [53] Ibid. 78.
[54] T. S. Eliot, 'What is a Classic?', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 131.
[55] Ibid. 128. See Duncan F. Kennedy, 'Eliot's account of Virgil and the *Aeneid* is at times explicitly providential and teleological' ('Modern Receptions and their Interpretative

imposed by the royalist–Catholic convictions that underlie Eliot's view of the cultural history of the West. Sainte-Beuve's account can look this way. But appearances are deceptive. Dante mattered far less to Sainte-Beuve's scheme of things than to Eliot's, and, where the argument about Virgil himself is concerned, its drift is not strictly teleological (elsewhere Sainte-Beuve will pour scorn on all teleological–providentialist theories of history, although reserving the sharper edge of his tongue for manifestations of teleological historical reasoning on the political left). Yet the Christian reference remains a strong one, and issues finally in the strange identification of Aeneas with a knight of the Middle Ages: such is 'le caractère religieux et soumis d'Enée' (the religious and submissive character of Aeneas) that 'pour lui rendre toute justice, figurons-nous un parfait héros chrétien du moyen âge' (in order to do justice to him, let us imagine a perfect Christian hero of the Middle Ages).[56]

The historically careless nature of the identification (unusual in Sainte-Beuve) may encourage us to persist with the claim that there is indeed much here that is potentially deceptive. Religion as such is not one of the main concerns of *Étude sur Virgile*. It is rather a cloak for a set of far more secular and worldly preoccupations, a subtending politics. Virgil is above all the poet of peace, of the restoration of tranquillity to public and private life in Roman society after the ravages of civil war: 'Plus qu'aucun poète, Virgile est rempli du dégoût et du malheur des guerres civiles, et, en général, des guerres, des dissensions et des luttes violentes' (More than any other poet, Virgil is filled with disgust before the misfortune of civil war and, in general, of violent wars, dissensions, and conflicts).[57] His work is the reflection and affirmation of 'un état meilleur' in which 'la nation … se tourne ardemment vers l'ordre, vers le repos et le salut' (the nation … turns fervently towards order, rest, and salvation), the fulfilment of 'cet immense besoin de paix et de félicité dans la grandeur, qui était alors le cri impérieux de tout le monde romain' (that immense need for peace and happiness in greatness, which was then the imperious cry of the whole Roman world).[58] This has less to do with Christ than with Augustus, the figure of the ruler, and correspondingly with the image of Virgil as the poet of the imperial settlement. Sainte-Beuve can write scarcely a page on Virgil without evoking Augustus; the real identification is not of Virgil with the medieval Christian knight, but with the Emperor, in a causal bind whereby we cannot make sense of Augustus without Virgil and we cannot make sense of Virgil without Augustus, each a condition of the other:

Implications', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1997), 49).

[56] *Étude sur Virgile*, 283. [57] Ibid. 43. [58] Ibid. 64–6.

L'époque décisive d'Auguste n'a tout son sens moral et ne nous livre tout son magnanime tresaillement que quand on y a entendu Virgile … Ainsi, il est certain (dût l'expression de ce fait déplaire, je ne sais pourquoi, à quelques-uns) que l'âme, le talent de Virgile avait trouvé dans Auguste son climat le plus désiré.

The decisive age of Augustus acquires all its moral sense and delivers to us its generous vibration only when one has heard in it the voice of Virgil … Thus, it is certain (even if, I don't myself know why, the expression were to displease some persons) that the soul, the talent, of Virgil found in Augustus its most longed-for climate.[59]

Virgil may be the poet of polite social intercourse or the proto-Christian virtues of meekness and pity, but he is first and foremost the epic voice of the *pax romana* and the imperial state. The great 'river' flowing from ancient Rome to modern France, the source from which 'on ne se sépare plus', consists first and foremost in the legacy the poet of the imperium transmits to 'us'. This is the Virgil whom Sainte-Beuve proposes for France and French cultural self-understanding. For there is also a false Virgil, a pseudo-*Aeneid*, instantiated by Ronsard's unfinished epic of national life *La Franciade*. Ronsard (more Greek than Latin, on Sainte-Beuve's account) travelled the wrong literary road at the wrong time, in seeking to compose an epic poem at a time of national strife:

Une sorte d'*Enéide* était-elle possible en France au seizième siècle? Je ne le crois pas. Pour composer une *Enéide*, il faut le talent d'abord; il faut aussi que le temps et les princes y soient propices; et rien de cela ne se rencontrait au berceau de *la Franciade*. Au lieu de venir à l'une de ces grandes époques où le monde se rassoit, Ronsard tombait dans un temps où tout bouillonne, et où, pour ainsi dire, on entre dans la chaudière … Lors même que, dans le sujet et la fable de Francus, il y aurait eu matière à une composition nationale, il manquait donc la famille des Jules et un Auguste demandant à Virgile l'*Enéide* au lendemain de son triomphe et de la célébration des jeux de Troie, et comme un magnifique couronnement de la paix du monde.

Was a kind of *Aeneid* possible in sixteenth-century France? I do not believe so. In order to compose an *Aeneid*, talent is first required; it is also necessary that the times and the princes prove favourable to it; and nothing of that sort was to be seen at the birth of the *Franciade*. Instead of coming into one of those great epochs where the world settles down, Ronsard found himself in a time when everything is on the boil and when, so to speak, one enters a cauldron … Even if, with the subject matter and story of Francus, there was material for a national composition, what was missing was the family of Julius and Augustus requesting of Virgil an *Aeneid* on the morrow of its triumph and the celebration of the Trojan Games, as a magnificent crowning of the peace of the world.[60]

The emergence of a modern *Aeneid* requires political tranquillity or, in yet another inflection of the 'sedentary' motif, a 'monde qui se rassoit' (a world

[59] *Étude sur Virgile*, 79, 254. [60] *CL* xii. 82–3.

that once more sits down). By contrast with *La Franciade*, the spirit of the true 'French' Virgil is to be found not in an original work but in a translation, in the sensitively compassionate tones of the later eighteenth-century rendering of the *Aeneid* by the abbé Delille:

Au milieu de toutes les richesses et des graves élégances que le génie de Virgile renferme et qu'il découvre successivement à qui sait l'étudier, il est un caractère particulier au poète, qui tient à sa sensibilité même, et qui ne répondait pas moins à une disposition sociale presque universelle à l'époque où Delille reparaissait. Virgile, qui avait traversé la fin des guerres civiles et qui en avait souffert, ressentait plus qu'aucun Romain, dans son âme pacifique et sereine, le besoin d'union, de conciliation, de piété et de pitié (ce n'est que le même mot), qui, à cette heure voisine d'une ère nouvelle, à la veille d'une mystérieuse et divine naissance, agitait sourdement les entrailles du monde … Delille, le chanter de la Pitié, était habile et enclin à saisir cette veine, cette fibre en son poète, et, chaque fois qu'il la touchait, il était sûr d'intéresser, de remuer autour de lui bien des cœurs.

In the midst of all the riches and solemn elegance that Virgil's genius houses and progressively unfolds to whomever knows how to study it, there is one particular characteristic of the poet that derives from his personal sensibility and yet that also spoke to an almost universal social tendency in Delille's time. Virgil, who had lived through the end of the civil wars and had suffered greatly from them, felt more than any other Roman, in his serene and peace-loving soul, the need for unity, conciliation, piety, and pity (they are identical words), who at this threshold of a new era, on the eve of a mysterious and divine birth, silently stirred the entrails of the world … Delille, who sang the gospel of Pity, had both the skill and the inclination to grasp this vein, this streak in his poet, and, everytime he touched it, he was sure to affect and move many a heart in his vicinity.[61]

This is hardly a judgement likely to inspire confidence (elsewhere Sainte-Beuve proves less duped by the element of pure *sensiblerie* in Delille's cloying hymns to 'pity'[62]), but if here Delille's translation is seen as offering us a Virgil with whom we can feel at home, it is because the more general argument of *Étude sur Virgile* is heading fast to a strictly extra-literary terminus. Up to a point Sainte-Beuve himself tells us where we are going, from Augustus to the reign of Louis XIV: 'On entrevoit déjà, à travers les différences et sauf l'incomparable supériorité de son esprit, ses quelques resemblances avec Louis XIV' (We already glimpse, through the various differences and while taking into account the incomparable superiority of his mind, his several resemblances to Louis XIV).[63] The Virgilian classic and seventeenth-century French 'classicism' have in common not just a set of literary values but also a shared set of enabling political conditions. But there is more to come. From the Augustan/Virgilian model of Latinity a lineage can be traced that runs, predictably,

[61] *Étude sur Virgile*, 21. [62] *CL* vi and vii. [63] *Étude sur Virgile*, 70.

to Louis XIV and, incredibly, to Louis-Napoleon.[64] The message of Virgil, transmitted by way of the gentle abbé Delille, is peace in our time—that is, the post-1848 pacification wrought by the *coup d'état* and the inauguration of the Second Empire. In *Étude sur Virgile* the analogy is but discreetly allusive, albeit a subtext that was clear to his audience (which reacted in appropriately hostile fashion). It will become explicit elsewhere, in particular in Sainte-Beuve's discussion of the 'humanizing' value of Virgil for Fénelon's tutoring of Louis's grandson, the Duke of Burgundy.[65] In an apparently arbitrary but in fact far from incidental set of associations, Sainte-Beuve leaps from the place of Virgil in the education of an heir to the seventeenth-century throne to a rousing evocation of the beneficial rule of his own sovereign: 'je pensais qu'au milieu de nos divisions mêmes d'opinions, il était consolant qu'on fût venu à ce grand et magnifique résultat, aussi clair que le jour, à savoir qu'il n'y a plus en France qu'un seul ordre, une seule classe, un seul peuple' (I thought that, in the very midst of our differences of opinion, there was much consolation in having got to this great and magnificent result, as clear as daylight, namely, that in France there is now but one order, one class, one people).[66]

That Sainte-Beuve might have thought in this way about the nexus of politics, education, and literature in the seventeenth century comes as no surprise. But that he could have construed the Virgilian ideal of *humanitas*, suitably lacquered with a touch of seventeenth-century French polish, as a viable ideal for the Second Empire almost beggars belief.[67] This capitulation of the critical mind before the facts of power also bears on the occasion of the lectures themselves that were to form the book *Étude sur Virgile*. The long *ouverture* is a reflection on what it means to address the question of Virgil at the Collège de France in the year 1855. There is first a brief history of the institution, the glorious moment of its beginnings as a royal foundation, its phases of dissension and inertia, and then finally its place in the 'modern' *pax institutionalis* of the Second Empire: 'Un des bienfaits de l'ordre moderne et de l'unité française, c'est d'avoir ôté le prétexte et l'idée de ces querelles et de ces guerres civiles dans la science, qui contribuaient, là aussi, à dénaturer les

[64] In running these disreputable analogies, Sainte-Beuve ignored his own argument (in the review of Quinet's epic poem on Napoleon) that the external conditions (mainly political) for the epic representation of both Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte were missing (*PC* ii. 317). This was a reprise of Boileau's views on the unavailability of epic to modernity (see Fumaroli, 'Les Abeilles et les araignées', 146).

[65] *NL* ii. 129. [66] *NL* ii. 150.

[67] For a more realistic view, see Sainte-Beuve's summary of Fontanes's opinion: 'Le siècle d'Auguste eût été l'idéal; mais, pour la gloire des lettres, ce siècle d'Auguste, en France, était déjà passé avec celui de Louis XIV' ( The age of Augustus might have been the ideal; but, where literary glory is concerned, the age of Augustus in France had passed with that of Louis XIV) (*PL* 524).

mœurs et à entacher les caractères, comme font toujours les guerres civiles' (One of the benefits of modern order and French unity is having removed the pretext and the principle of those scientific quarrels and civil wars that, there as well, contributed to the denaturing of manners and the tainting of character, which is always the effect of civil wars).[68]

Virgil, Augustus, Louis-Napoleon, and Sainte-Beuve thus come together in the hallowed precincts of the Collège de France to proclaim the folly of civil strife and an end to the age of revolution. It is no wonder that Sainte-Beuve was heckled and booed at these appropriations of the classic to the legitimation of a fraudulent regime. Sainte-Beuve must have had an inkling of what was in store for him, since he prepared his text with a clear view to standing his ground against an incredulous and restive public: 'dût l'expression de ce fait déplaire, je ne sais pourquoi, à quelques-uns' (even if some were, I know not why, to be displeased by the expression of this point) is evidently freighted with more than just concern about the point being made in a local context (the comparison of Augustus with Louis XIV); the 'fact' in question is far more general in implication. In standing his ground, Sainte-Beuve was staking out new ground for his future role as a critic, mediating between past and present, culture and anarchy. It was advance warning of what had been emerging, gradually and gropingly, during most of the past decade, what had come to a head with the events of '48, and what henceforth Sainte-Beuve was to define as the meaning of the classic for modern times and, relatedly, the 'function' of criticism. We shall see the forms this took in later chapters. But before arriving there, we have to take a detour. For there was another context through which the question of the heritage of Latinity had to pass: the Middle Ages and the making of France, French, and Frenchness across the vast swathe of political and cultural history from Gallo-Roman times through the Merovingian and Carolingian periods to the courtly world of the troubadours and the *trouvères*. This was a question encountered, from a literary–critical point of view, in the emerging discipline of medieval studies, and, from an historiographical point of view, in the competing narratives of the Gauls and the Franks.

[68] *Étude sur Virgile*, 6–7.

# 6

# Origins and the Middle Ages

## I

The appropriation of far-flung zones of antiquity to the cause of national awakening in Germany from Herder and Friedrich Schlegel onwards took hold in another major crucible of the nineteenth-century culture wars: the Middle Ages. The 'revenge of the "barbarian" ' consisted, among other things, in positing the ancient epics of India, Persia, Greece, and Scandinavia as the natural relatives of medieval German literature; the *Iliad*, the *Mahabarata*, the *Shahnamah*, the *Edda* became the distant cousins of the *Nibelungenlied*, while the *Minnesänge*r were used (notably by Eckstein on the back of Lachmann's researches) to trump the Troubadours.[1] This was part of the concerted campaign to bring the German Middle Ages disruptively into the world of Latinity,[2] a kind of belated literary equivalent, one might say, of the Teutonic conquest of Gaul. A. W. Schlegel's Berlin lectures, delivered while corresponding with Friedrich in Paris, 'sang the praises of medieval Christendom and celebrated the legacy of the barbarian invasions';[3] what, from an Enlightenment point of view, had been the dark ages, was now seen as an auroral radiance cast on the black night of the corruption and decay of the Roman empire.

This was to touch a raw nerve in France, reflected above all in the historiographical debates centred primarily on the work of Augustin Thierry (we come to this later). In the sphere of literary and cultural thought, the tide seemed initially unstoppable, from the Ossian cult through to Chateaubriand, Quinet, Hugo, and the many other practitioners of literary medievalism (although, as we shall see, it is more in the sphere of scholarly medievalism

[1] Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 211, 262. Michel Bréal dismissed the alignment of the *Iliad* with the *Nibelungenlied* as so much poppycock (*Pour mieux connaître Homère* (Paris, 1909), 124).

[2] What, summarizing the attitudes of Herder and Schlegel, Schwab refers to as the belief in the 'salutory nature of Germanic contributions to the Latin world' (*The Oriental Renaissance*, 72).

[3] Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London, 1995), 261.

that Sainte-Beuve's views are more usefully situated[4]). The most famous early importer into France of the Germanist construction of the Middle Ages was Mme de Staël initially (and restrainedly) in *De la littérature* and then, in more full-blooded partisan mode, in *De l'Allemagne*. In fact, whereas Mme de Staël was originally read as providing a manifesto for 'Northern' primitivism, we now tend to see her as situated at a crossroads between enlightenment and romanticism. This is particularly the case in respect of *De la littérature*, in which the view of the barbarian invasions of Gaul as a civilizing (that is, Christianizing) counter to the decadence of the Roman Empire is nevertheless inflected in terms of a moderate version of enlightenment republicanism rather than in those of the newer tribal populism. The text to hand was Tacitus, which, as Catherine Volpilhac-Auger has shown, lent itself to all manner of ideological readings.[5] For Mme de Staël (as for other liberal opponents of the Bonapartist tyranny) 'Tacitus' meant 'Germanic liberty' as this would have been understood by someone of liberal–republican persuasions (elsewhere, of course, it was variously interpreted as a recipe for aristocratic feudal freedoms or the 'purity' of the national community).[6]

In his portrait of Mme de Staël, Sainte-Beuve claimed that her great work was *De la littérature*, on grounds, moreover, that anticipate the much later account of her true historical and intellectual location: the merit of *De la littérature* according to Sainte Beuve lay in its marrying a tempered republicanism with a defence of romantic modernism (a view that Sainte-Beuve himself may have got from Heine, who attributed this mix to her more rational Protestant angle on Christianity), or possibly from Fauriel, who also saw *De la littérature* in eighteenth-century Enlightenment terms.[7] Sainte-Beuve (again echoing Heine) was notably less enthusiastic about *De l'Allemagne*, in which, perhaps under the influence of the unbridled pan-Germanism of her

[4] For Sainte-Beuve's views on literary (as distinct from scholarly) medievalism, see 'Quelques vérités en littérature': 'Demain ce sera les Pères de l'Eglise; avant-hier, c'était le moyen-âge. On traite ces époques comme des terrains vides où la spéculation se porte et où l'on bâtit' (Tomorrow it will be the Church Fathers, the day before yesterday it was the Middle Ages. One treats these periods as empty spaces on which speculation feeds what one builds) (*PC* iii. 424).

[5] Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, *Tacite en France de Montesquieu à Chateaubriand* (Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century; Oxford, 1993).

[6] Sainte-Beuve wrote about Tacitus in his review of Burnouf's translation of the complete works, but his concerns are entirely literary, confined for the most part to questions of style and translation (*Pr.L.* i. 231–41).

[7] Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 241. In connection with the earlier 'consensus among literary critics that Staël's historical role had been to blaze a trail for Romanticism', Thom suggests that if 'one were to trace this belief back to its origins, one would no doubt come to the generation of 1830, and to its most influential critic, Sainte-Beuve' (p. 208). But, along with Heine and Fauriel, Sainte-Beuve saw Mme de Staël as belonging as much to the Late Enlightenment as to romanticism.

friend Charles de Villers,[8] the primitivist chord resonates far more loudly. For there remained contemporaneously the other Tacitus, especially the Tacitus foregrounded by the notorious *tamquam/quamquam* controversy that was to play so dangerously into later nineteenth-century racism.[9] This was the Tacitus that excited the Schlegels, and, as Heine wrote, 'in the din of voices that cry out from the pages of [*De l'Allemagne*], the most distinctly audible is always the clear falsetto of Mr A. W. Schlegel'.[10] In the portrait Sainte-Beuve says very little about *De l'Allemagne*, and is clearly ill at ease with it. If Mme de Staël opens a window onto the brilliance of German poetry, it is the poetry of the age of Goethe (the only German writer who really counts for Sainte-Beuve), after whom all is 'decadence' in Germany. Compared with *De l'Allemagne*, there is a distinct preference for *Corinne*, precisely because the latter vacates the scene of the Nordic mists for the sunlit uplands of Italy and Rome ('Ici ne s'interpose aucun nuage léger de Germanie' (Here not even the slightest cloud from the sky of Germania intervenes)).[11]

These hesitations and reservations may go some way to explaining one of the more conspicuous negative features of Sainte-Beuve's critical œuvre. If one of the great strengths of the *Lundis* is that, beyond the tiresome (because methodologically repetitive) sequence of individual biographical profiles, it offers us a splendid panorama of French literature, the place accorded to medieval literature is disappointingly marginal.[12] This doubtless reflects a number of strictly contingent factors: the scarcity of reliable editions in 'the pre-professional age of medieval studies'[13] as well as Sainte-Beuve's lack of proficiency in Old French and Occitan. Given what was in the air, one might nevertheless have expected something commensurate with the kind of excitement represented, for instance, by Francisque Michel's astonishingly lapidary telegram from Oxford ('J'ai trouvé *La Chanson de Roland*' (I have found *La Chanson de Roland*)), all the more so given that one of the

[8] Charles de Villers bought wholesale into the Schlegelian thesis of the superiority of the roots-based and thus dynamic German language over the 'static' quality of French (along—improbably—with Dutch, English, and the Scandinavian languages, described as mere 'jargons'). See L. Wittmer, *Charles de Villers 1765–1815* (Geneva and Paris, 1908).

[9] The controversy turned on the grammar of a passage in the *Germania* dealing with the physiological homogeneity of the Germanic tribes. The tradition of commentary and translation from Schlegel to the Nazis and the racist Houston Stewart Chamberlain preferred *quamquam* as conferring more certainty on Tacitus' ascription of racial purity to the more speculative and equivocal *tamquam*. For details see Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 219–20. Sainte-Beuve's comments on Burnouf's translation do not address this contested textual point.

[10] Quoted in Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 241.

[11] *PF* 154.

[12] 'He was never much excited by the earliest monuments of the national literature' (A. G. Lehmann, *Sainte-Beuve: A Portrait of the Critic 1804–1842* (Oxford, 1962), 231).

[13] Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), 173.

few medieval works he admired was the *Roland*. He had a fondness for the *chroniqueurs* Villehardouin and Joinville (though not consistently for Froissart, of whom he said that, Froissart's history being history from the point of view of the feudal barons, 'il ne sait pas ce que c'est que d'être un Français' (he does not know what it is to be a Frenchman),[14] a judgement whose grounds take us far into what we shall later see as one of the defining issues of Sainte-Beuve's engagement with the historiography of the Middle Ages).

But, broadly speaking, the period did not greatly interest Sainte-Beuve, his essentially classical frame of mind inuring him against the seductions of Romantic medievalist revivalism. In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', it makes its way onto the slopes of Montserrat,[15] but the inclusion is a perfunctory one, presumably because, whatever their appeal, the Middle Ages also lack the capital virtues of order and coherence ('le moyen âge … confondit les rangs et les ordres' (the Middle Ages … confused ranks and orders)).[16] Where French medieval literature was concerned, Sainte-Beuve's attention span was short, and his judgements sporadic and unfocused. Sainte-Beuve sees French literature as 'beginning' in the sixteenth century, although this was, of course, an evaluative rather than a strictly historical judgement, in the sense of what satisfies the conditions for membership of what, in the portrait of Fauriel, he terms 'des époques littéraires constituées' (constituted literary epochs).[17] In this he entertained what was a sixteenth-century view

[14] *CL* viii. 178. [15] *CL* iii. 53. [16] *CL* iii. 39; see above, Ch. 2.

[17] *PC* iv. 231. In his early, pro-romantic mood Sainte-Beuve was less categorical, rebuking Boileau and Malherbe for having suppressed 'les grands rénovateurs de l'art au Moyen Age' (the great renovators of the art of the Middle Ages) (*PL* 10). But this was a phase that did not last. In the 1856 article on the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, the tone is distinctly more sceptical ('Au moyen-âge (et je parle des rares époques et des heures riantes, s'il y a eu des heures riantes au moyen-âge)' (In the Middle Ages (I speak here of the rare periods and the happy moments, assuming there were happy moments in the Middle Ages)) (*CL* xiii. 135)). On the other hand, in 1861 (in the article 'Les Poetes français'), Sainte-Beuve had second thoughts, conceding that the 'classical' dispositions of his literary tastes may have blinded him to the merits of medieval poetry: 'Le moyen âge, on le sait et on l'ose dire aujourd'hui, fut … une grande époque; je le répète après tant d'autres, mais avec une conviction d'autant plus profonde que j'y ai été amené avec lenteur et presque à mon corps défendant. Chaque esprit a, pour ainsi dire, son climat natal; le mien était plutôt celui des époques civilisées, cultivées, dans le sens classique et de la Renaissance. J'ai dû me forcer un peu pour remonter plus haut et m'enfoncer dans des régions d'apparence inculte et âpre. Je continue sans doute de faire mes réserves, et je demeure récalcitrant ou, si l'on veut, classique sur quelques points; mais en lisant certaines Chansons de geste, en étant obligé par profession de les étudier, de les analyser et de les démontrer à d'autres, comment n'en pas venir à en apprécier la matière, à en admirer le jet et la sève?' (The Middle Ages, we now know and dare state today, was … a great period; I repeat it in the wake of many others, but with a conviction all the more profound in that I was brought to it slowly and almost over my dead body. All minds have, so to speak, their native soil; mine was that rather of the civilized, cultivated period in the classical sense and that of the Renaissance. I

itself, and it is perhaps no accident that one of the few places where he supplies a brief overview of French medieval literature is in the study of Du Bellay. It is very much a hindsight history from the point of view of the needs and priorities of the early Renaissance. In particular, Sainte-Beuve enthusiastically underwrites Du Bellay's belief that the formation of an authentically French literature had to begin by exiting from the Middle Ages in favour of a return to classical antiquity in the spirit of 'creative assimilation'.[18]

There is here a particular antipathy to what pressed more immediately on the literary horizon of the Pléiade, the later Middle Ages, identified broadly with the progeny spawned by the *Roman de la Rose*.[19] For Sainte-Beuve the latter was a mere artificial confection that 'apporta dans le courant des idées poétiques une perturbation étrange' (which brought a strange perturbation to the current of poetic ideas).[20] There was a happier medieval moment: the early thirteenth century when the emergence of French—via Latin—as a fully-fledged Romance vernacular (he presumably means 'francien') reached an apogee, a miraculous moment of youthful flowering and relative maturity,[21] but this was a moment doomed to perish as irreversible decline set in. A similar perspective is sketched in respect of the *Chanson de Roland*. Sainte-Beuve admires it as a virile 'patriotic' epic ('sa branche la plus haute, la plus vigoureuse et la plus féconde, la Chanson de geste, l'Epopée' (its loftiest, most vigorous and most fertile branch, the Chanson de geste, the Epic)[22]) that

had to force myself a little to go back further and bury myself in regions that are apparently uncouth and rough. I doubtless continue to entertain reservations and I remain recalcitrant or, if you prefer, classical on some points; but on reading certain *chansons de geste*, in finding myself professionally obliged to study them, to analyse them and demonstrate them to others, how could I not come to appreciate their substance, to admire their thrust and sap?) (*Pr.L.* iii. 147–8). However, the concession did not bring him to alter the literary–historical narrative according to which the Middle Ages left no substantial trace on the subsequent development of French poetry. Whatever its intrinsic merits, it proved culturally and historically to be a dead end. The medieval revival of the romantic period was an artificial construction, mere substitute for what might have been but never was, a genuine infusion from the Middle Ages into the modern age.

[18] *NL* xiii. 296. See also the article on Malherbe, which refers to the Middle Ages as 'la barbarie où nous étions jusqu'au règne de François I^er^' (the barbaric state we were in up until the reign of François I) (*CL* viii. 70).

[19] This was a more general theme in nineteenth-century medieval studies (see Janine Rosalind Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851–1900* (Oxford, 1973), 103). Littré was particularly prominent in running the model of efflorescence followed by decay (see Stephen G. Nichols, 'Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies', in R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (eds.), *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (Baltimore, 1996), 38).

[20] *NL* xiii. 289. For a similar association of the *Roman de la Rose* with decline, see *NL* xiii. 362.

[21] *NL* xiii. 288–9.

[22] *NL* xiii. 266.

might have opened the road to a more sustained literary development. But it is the tense of the counterfactual that matters most here. Whatever promise was embodied in the example of the *Roland*, it was eclipsed and finally extinguished in the decaying culture of the later romances:

C'est que le grand et primitif Roland était tout à fait oublié, et … ce noble et fier sujet, ce héros du Moyen Age, était tombé en parodie … Mais quel malheur, j'en conviens, que l'on n'ait pu alors, par un retour hardi et une percée vers le Moyen Age, rompre et écarter ce faux horizon du *Roman de la Rose* et renouer une tradition saine, simple, glorieuse, patriotique, bien française!

The fact is that the great and primitive Roland was entirely forgotten, and … this proud and noble subject, this hero of the Middle Ages, had become an object of parody … But what a misfortune, I admit, that one was not then able, by means of a bold and piercing return back towards the Middle Ages, to break and dispose of that false horizon represented by the *Roman de la Rose* and renew a tradition that was healthy, simple, glorious, patriotic, thoroughly French![23]

More generally, the fragmentation and 'confusion' of French medieval culture meant that it lacked the conditions for the creation of true 'classic'. In Sainte-Beuve's counterfactual register, this would have been in the genre of the epic, but only if the period had had its equivalent of the figure who would have made the difference: Homer.

faute d'un grand poète comme Homère, ou comme le puissant rhapsode qui de loin nous donne l'idée d'un Homère, faute d'un poète qui pût, sinon fixer la langue, du moins la montrer et l'attester à jamais par une œuvre vivante, et solenniser ce noble et simple genre en l'attachant dans la mémoire des hommes avec des clous d'airain et de diamant, on alla à la dérive, selon le cours du temps et la dégénérescence des choses.

lacking a great poet such as Homer or such as the powerful rhapsode who from way back gives us the idea of a Homer, lacking a poet who could, if not fix the language, at least show and bear witness to it through a living work, and make a solemn occasion of this noble and simple genre by attaching it in men's memory with nails of copper

[23] *NL* xiii. 315. For similar views, see also *CL* viii. 282, 322, and *Pr.L.* iii. 148 (where the *Roland* epic is characterized as 'si impériale et nationale'). Here Sainte-Beuve echoed the nationalist commonplaces of nineteenth-century French medievalism, most notably Gaston Paris and Léon Gautier. Gautier in particular associated the medieval epic with a teleological conception of nationhood as divinely inspired (Nichols, 'Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies', 42–9). Gautier is described in the Du Bellay articles as 'un jeune érudit, plein d'ardeur et de foi' (a young scholar, full of ardour and faith), although Sainte-Beuve takes his distance from Gautier's depreciation of the Renaissance (*NL* xiii. 286–8). Renan also pitched in with his nationalist pennyworth on the meaning of the *Chanson de Roland*: 'C'est l'esprit de la nation, son génie si l'on veut, qui est le véritable auteur de la *Chanson de Roland*. Le poète n'est que l'écho harmonieux, je dirais presque le scribe qui écrit sous la dictée du peuple' (The true author of the *Chanson de Roland* is the spirit of the nation, its genius, if you prefer. The poet is but the harmonious echo, as one might put it, virtually the scribe who writes under the dictation of the people) (*Cahiers de jeunesse, 1845–1846* (Paris, 1906), 133).

and diamond, everything went downhill, in accordance with the degenerating temper of the times.[24]

These sentiments may be in part determined by metonymic contagion (the fact that they appear in a text on the first of France's literary nationalists), and perhaps also by the more general nineteenth-century harnessing of the *Chanson de Roland* to the nationalist bandwagon as a counterweight to the German variety (a process that was to go into overdrive during and after the Franco-Prussian war). But this patriotic elevation of the *chanson de geste* sits oddly with what elsewhere Sainte-Beuve defines as the truly distinctive feature of French medieval writing: the ribald comic *fabliau* of the Northern 'trouvères' and the *Roman de Renart*. His one sustained account of a medieval literary work (apart from the articles on the *chroniqueurs*) is of the *Renart* (inspired by Fauriel's article in the *Histoire littéraire de la France*), from which he concludes that, in displacing the earlier heroic tradition of the *chanson de geste* and parodying the chivalric romances, the *fabliau* colonized the space of medieval letters because it was the genre that corresponded most to the essence of 'Frenchness' ('l'esprit français'):

> L'esprit gaulois de nos pères prévalut pourtant et l'emporta de bonne heure sur la pureté et la force. Les fabliaux les plus moqueurs florissaient déjà du temps de saint Louis: cette veine est encore la plus sûre et la moins interrompue, quand on veut remonter à l'esprit français des vieux âges. Aujourd'hui, nous pouvons retrouver ce même esprit en plein, et comme à sa source, dans un large réservoir où toutes les inventions satiriques sont rassemblées, c'est ce qu'on nomme le *Roman de Renart*.
>
> The Gaulish spirit of our forebears nevertheless prevailed and won out early over purity and strength. The most irreverent of the *fabliaux* were already flourishing in Saint Louis's time: this vein remains the steadiest, the least interrupted, when one tries to go back to the French spirit of olden times. Today, we can refind this very same spirit in abundance and as if at its source, in a large reservoir where all these satirical inventions are gathered, in what is called the *Roman de Renart*.[25]

We note the implied equation here between 'esprit français' and 'esprit gaulois', the latter elsewhere posited as 'notre vieux génie populaire' (our ancient popular genius).[26] This notion of an original, unselfconscious national 'genius' clearly meant something to Sainte-Beuve, since he will repeat it on numerous occasions, sometimes in contexts expressly designed to draw a

[24] *NL* xiii. 289.
[25] *CL* viii. 282. Here Sainte-Beuve ignores his own reservations over Nisard's appeal to the concept of 'esprit français'.
[26] *CL* viii. 203.

contrast between the Gallic and the Germanic. In his article on La Fontaine, for example, the Gallic is seen as a tradition running from the *Roman de Renart* and culminating in the fables of La Fontaine ('l'Homère de la vieille race gauloise' (the Homer of the ancient Gaulish race), is—in the circumstances—the somewhat lax analogy[27]), in opposition to the 'sentimental' and 'metaphysical' idioms that Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, and Lamartine were to import from Germany (much of the piece is an extended rebuke to Lamartine for his dismissal of La Fontaine). This French version of the 'naïve' was essentially light-hearted, earthy, and irreverent ('Rabelaisian' is the epithet that will often spring to mind, in, for instance, the characterization of Guérin's style as 'prose gauloise, digne des vieux aïeux rabelaisiens de la terre bourguignonne' (Gaulish prose, worthy of the Rabelaisian ancestors of Burgundy)[28]). It also has a political resonance in its provocations of authority, 'republican' in the sense of 'l'antique acception de nos pères' (the old meaning of our forefathers).[29] On the other hand, it can also come out as something of a national 'vice' (in connection with Malherbe's sternly corrective poetics it is identified as 'le vice national, la légèreté gauloise' (the national vice, Gaulish frivolity)[30]), requiring a bracing antidote (for example, the intellectual and spiritual austerity of that quintessentially un-French 'intelligence aristocratique' Renan).[31]

This is about as far as Sainte-Beuve gets with 'Gaulishness'. Its main function is clear (as part of the ongoing, earth-bound resistance to the metaphysical

[27] *CL* vii. 533. Sainte-Beuve probably came across the Homer/La Fontaine analogy in the writings of Joubert, who was the first to use it (see Jean-Charles Darmon, 'Préface' to La Fontaine, *Fables*, ed. Jean-Charles Darmon and Sabine Gruffat (Paris, 2002), 5).

[28] *NL* iii. 160. These descriptions are also applied to Béranger ('gaulois' in the sense of 'la goguette, la gaudriole, la malice narquoise et gauloise' (merriness, broadness, sardonic Gaulish banter and roguishness) (*NL* i. 168)); to Ducis ('de la race toute crue des vieux et naïfs gaulois' (of the thoroughly coarse race of the ancient and naive Gauls) (*NL* iv. 387)); to Collé ('le dernier des Gaulois' (the last of the Gauls)), his correspondence as 'ce classique de la gaudriole' (that classic of bawdy humour) (*NL* vii. 370–2).

[29] Mézeray is placed with Rotrou as 'l'un des derniers Gaulois', in turn associated with a 'republican' disposition: 'Mézeray est d'humeur républicain, à prendre le mot dans l'antique acception de nos pères', that is, 'un républicain d'avant L XVI et non d'après L XVI' (Mézeray is republican by temperament, taking the word in the old sense of our ancestors … a republican of the time before and not after Louis XVI) (*CL* viii. 197, 201, 229). This republican inflection of the role of *gauloiserie* in feudal opposition to centralized authority during the Middle Ages was also a running theme in nineteenth-century medieval studies, especially prominent in the writings of Ampère and Taine (see Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature*, 102–4).

[30] *NL* xiii. 403.

[31] In Sainte-Beuve's summary, Renan's admiration of feudalism rests entirely on a celebration of baronial force ('l'intelligence des forts' (the intelligence of the strong)) and is robustly anti-egalitarian in any of the senses that might align feudal 'liberty' with the republican principles of 1789 ('un fait français de vulgarisation utilitaire' (a French product of utilitarian vulgarization) (*NL* xiii. 403, 407)). Renan himself wrote: 'Il n'y a jamais eu en Europe une dynastie durable qui n'ait été d'origine germanique' (There has never been in Europe a lasting dynasty that was not of Germanic origin) (*Mélanges d'histoire et de voyage* (Paris, 1878), 165–6).

dreams of German-inspired medievalism), but as a literary–cultural category it is pretty thin, or at least cannot possibly bear the full weight Sainte-Beuve wishes it to support. It is perhaps another token of his reluctance to get inside the relevant literary frame (that is, to exercise the capacity for 'sympathetic' criticism for which he was famed). Yet, if relatively indifferent to medieval literature, he was certainly interested in the *question* of the Middle Ages, as posed and explored by the developing, if half-formed, discipline of nineteenth-century medieval scholarship, much of it disseminated in the *Revue des deux mondes*.[32] In particular Sainte-Beuve showed a sustained interest in the work of Claude Fauriel, whose 'portrait' is by far the longest in the Beuvian journalistic œuvre (the four consecutive articles in the *Portraits contemporains* run to over 100 pages, the dimensions of a short book; very few of Sainte-Beuve's subjects get quite this extended treatment).

We shall come later to this substantial commentary. Sainte-Beuve's admiration for Fauriel's pioneering scholarship was inseparable, or at least incompletely separable, from considerations of ideology. For medieval studies were, from their beginnings, umbilically tied to varieties of 'medievalism', a bond that proved unbreakable even in the late nineteenth century when medieval studies finally constituted themselves as a fully professional (ie 'positivist') academic discipline. The gap between the two phases of the nineteenth century is often given a shorthand representation in the contrast between Paulin Paris and his son, Gaston Paris, a gap that Paris *fils* himself did much to highlight in his 1881 lecture at the Collège de France.[33] But while there is much truth in Gaston's account of the history of the subject in France, this was also clearly a prime instance of an oedipal scenario playing itself out, and in any case the alleged shift from romantic enthusiasm to disciplined positivism in no way prevented Gaston Paris from taking to the rostrum in 1870 (the year of the Franco-Prussian war) to do his patriotic duty by lecturing on the example for modern France of the heroic-warrior ethic of the *Chanson de Roland*.[34]

Thus, once again, as with the closely related development of comparative philology, the crossing of medieval studies as a discipline and medievalism as an ideology pivoted on the rivalry between France and Germany. And, once again, Sainte-Beuve to a large extent stood above the fray. He has no a priori objection to German interest in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, in the

[32] See Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 174.

[33] Gaston Paris, 'Paulin Paris et la littérature française du moyen âge', in *Poésie du moyen âge* (Paris, 1906), 211–54.

[34] During hostilities, Gaston Paris gave his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France under the title 'La Chanson de Roland et la nationalité française' (see David E. Hult, 'Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love', in Bloch and Nichols (eds.), *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, 195).

curious article 'L'Histoire de Sainte Elizabeth' he chances some remarks on the German discovery of 'l'art *allemand* du moyen âge' (*German* art of the Middle Ages) by the 'école catholique allemande' (a school that includes 'les Schlegel, Görres, Novalis') as forming 'déjà une chaîne assez complète et brillante' (already a fairly complete and brilliant sequence).[35] But while the emphasis on the term 'allemand' is mine and not Sainte-Beuve's, the implied caveat is clear: all is well on the other side of the Rhine provided that borders are respected. What the Germans do with the German Middle Ages is their business, but what is less welcome is any 'nuage de Germanie' straying across the border. This is, of course, a caricature, just as the added emphasis is something of a tendentious representation. But where borders, both national and personal, are concerned, irritation and lassitude can quickly take hold.

In the article on Parny, the medieval turn is seen as something of an unwanted imposition ('le Moyen-Age s'impose à nous, il nous domine' (The Middle Ages imposes itself, it dominates us)), but if we are obliged by the times to go there, it is only

> pour en revenir à apprécier tout ce qui rentre dans le génie de la France, et ce qui exprime le goût français … est-il donc indispensable d'avoir lu les Nibelungen? Peut-être. C'est, dans tous les cas, le chemin le plus long, et le jour où l'on rentre au logis, on court risque d'être si fortement fatigué, que le sommeil s'ensuive.
>
> in order to get back to appreciating everything that forms the genius of France and that expresses French taste … is it indispensable to have read the Nibelungen? Perhaps. In any case, it is the longest way round, and by the time we get home, there is a risk of being so greatly fatigued that we fall asleep instantly.[36]

Being greatly fatigued by the company of the *Nibelungenlied* demands a restorative tonic brewed from the elements of a more home-grown substance. In the portrait of Quinet, a dose of Andrieux (him again!) mixed with a few other compatible ingredients seems to do the trick:

> Toutefois, Français de la tradition grecque et latine rajeunie, mais non brisée, ami surtout de la culture polie, studieuse, élaborée et perfectionnée, de la poésie des siècles d'Auguste, et, à leur défaut, des époques de Renaissance, le lendemain matin qui suit le jour de cette lecture, je reprends (tombant dans l'excès contraire sans doute) une ode latine en vers saphiques de Gray à son ami West, une dissertation d'Andrieux sur quelques points de la diction de Corneille, voire même les remarques grammaticales de d'Olivet sur Racine; et aussi je me mets à goûter à loisir, et à retourner en tous sens, au plus pur rayon de l'aurore, le plus cristallin des sonnets de Pétrarque.
>
> In any case, as a Frenchman belonging to a Greek and Latin tradition that has been renewed without being broken, as above all a friend to the polite, studious, developed

[35] *PC* ii. 426. [36] *CL* xv. 288–9.

and perfected poetic culture of the Augustan era and, when that is lacking, of the age of the Renaissance, the day following this reading, I take up (thereby doubtless falling victim to the opposite excess) a Latin ode in Sapphic verse form written by Gray for his friend West, a dissertation by Andrieux on certain grammatical points in Corneille, even the grammatical observations of d'Olivet on Racine; and in addition I give myself over to tasting at leisure, and examining from every point of view, the purest ray of the dawn, the most crystalline of Petrarch's sonnets.[37]

The final reference to Petrarch just about saves this from Sainte-Beuve at his enervatingly trivial worst, seeking digestive relief in the comfort of his armchair with a 'few points' on Corneille's diction by Andrieux and some grammatical 'remarks' on Racine by the abbé d'Olivet. But its relative triviality speaks to what was for Sainte-Beuve a deeper problem: whether, taken as a whole, the Middle Ages, and specifically medieval France, produced what could properly be called a 'literature', in the sense of a body of work governed by a coherent and unified canon of 'taste'. Or, to put it another way, what, from a Beuvian point of view, did medieval literature look like when subjected to the operations of critical judgement, the kinds of judgement entailed by the use of the verb *apprécier* in the Parny article? Today the verb is unlikely to strike us as a massively load-bearing term, but in the nineteenth century, especially with regard to the terms of scholarly medieval studies from Paulin Paris through to his son and successor, Gaston Paris, and, more broadly, their relation to the emergence of the project of a 'scientific' literary history in the hands of Gustave Lanson (aided by the great medievalist Josph Bédier), it was very heavily freighted indeed. In connection with medieval literature, the problem (what Sainte-Beuve calls 'une question fondamentale') is raised as early as 1832, at the beginning of his review of the recently published edition of the romance *Berte aux grans piés*, from the Carolingian cycle, by the then doyen of early nineteenth-century French medieval studies, Paulin Paris. It concerns the critical framework within which one is to approach medieval literature: as an object of aesthetic appreciation or as an object of historical understanding.

Cette polémique, toutefois, si pénible quant à la forme, soulevait une question fondamentale qui nous semble devoir être réservée. La pensée de notre jeune et savant collaborateur consistait à rechercher dans les anciennes épopées françaises, non pas seulement les imaginations plus ou moins gracieuses des conteurs et des poètes, non pas le mérite et l'agrément littéraire de leurs romans, mais les croyances diverses des populations, les récits historiques altérés, les invasions mythologiques qui avaient laissé des traces. Pour cela, la comparaison de nos épopées avec le cycle germanique, avec le cycle scandinave, devenait indispensable; notre cycle de la *Table Ronde* en particulier en pouvait recevoir une vive lumière. Cette pensée de notre collaborateur demeure

[37] *PC* ii. 325–6.

intacte, selon nous, et nous espérons qu'il ne la laissera pas tomber. Mais à prendre les choses par un côté plus exclusivement français et gaulois, plus littéraire … sans arriver de l'Allemagne ni s'être nourri des *Nibelungen* ou des *Eddas* … il y a lieu, sous le rapport du goût et d'une critique soigneuse et délicate, de faire des travaux précieux sur les vieux monuments de notre langue. C'est ce genre de mérite que M. Paris vient de prouver par sa publication de *Berte*.

Nevertheless, this polemic, however tedious in formal terms, raised a fundamental question that, it seems to me, has to be taken separately. The idea of our young and learned collaborator was to investigate in the ancient French epics not only the more or less graceful imaginations of the storytellers and the poets, not just the merits and literary charm of their romances, but also the different beliefs of populations, the distorted historical narratives, the mythological invasions that had deposited their traces. For that purpose, the comparison of our epics with the Germanic cycle, with the Scandinavian cycle, became indispensable; much bright light was then to be shed on our *Round Table* cycle in particular. To us, this idea of our collaborator remains intact, and we hope that he will not abandon it. But looking at the question from an exclusively French and Gaulish point of view, the more literary point of view … without having to come by way of Germany or having been nourished on a diet of the Nibelungen or the Edda … there is good reason, in terms of taste and a delicately careful form of literary criticism, to undertake valuable work on the old monuments of our language. It is the virtue of this approach that M. Paris has just proven with his publication of *Berte*.[38]

This passage is Sainte-Beuve's clearest statement of the intellectual dilemma that faced nineteenth-century scholarly medievalism in determining its central purposes: was the paradigm of study to be rooted in the older belletrist tradition of appreciative criticism (and, if so, according to what norms of literary judgement), or was it to be the philologically based hermeneutics of historical understanding (especially of the quasi-anthropological sort that saw the medieval epics as the embodiment of the collective mentality of a 'people' or a 'race')? The opposed paradigms, moreover, are assigned specific national locations. The appreciative style ('plus littéraire') is characteristically French, while the philological approach is ascribed largely to Germany. Paulin Paris is pictured as moving between the two, in a balancing act of which Sainte-Beuve approves while placing a special stress on the place of the former ('C'est ce genre de mérite que M. Paulin vient de prouver' (It is this kind of merit that M. Paulin has just established)). But, with the increasing professionalization of medieval scholarship in the course of the nineteenth century, it was to prove a non-sustainable act (until the stunning irruption into the field of Joseph Bédier). Gaston Paris, who succeeded his father as professor at the Collège de France, looked back to this earlier moment with a mixture of affection and contempt, in a concerted attempt to bury once and for all the

[38] *Pr.L.* ii. 75.

appreciative approach of the French belletrist tradition in the name of the new German-inspired philological positivism (for Gaston the key figure was the effective founder of the modern discipline of Romance philology, Friedrich Diez). In his review of his father's work, Gaston pronounced the essential difference between them as consisting in the decisive victory of the 'German' paradigm over the 'French' one:

> Toute sa vie, [Paulin Paris] chercha à … répandre le goût (des productions du moyen âge) … Il faut reconnaître que ses efforts n'ont pas été couronnés d'un plein succès, et peut-être y avait-il quelque illusion dans l'espoir qui les animait. En tout cas, nous comprenons aujourd'hui un peu différemment l'étude du moyen âge. Nous nous attachons moins à l'apprécier et à le faire apprécier qu'à le connaître et le comprendre. C'est ce que nous cherchons avant tout, c'est de l'histoire.
>
> All his life, [Paulin Paris] sought … to spread the taste for the productions of the Middle Ages … It must be acknowledged that his efforts have not been crowned with unambiguous success, and perhaps there was something illusory in the hope that animated them. In any case, we today understand something slightly different by the study of the Middle Ages. We are less attached to appreciating and having appreciated the Middle Ages than with knowing and understanding them. What above all we look for is history.[39]

The 'un peu' here is probably a concession to the conventions of filial respect. It is certainly a travesty of the facts, for what was being proposed was nothing less than a wholesale transformation of the field: the texts of medieval literature were to be seen less as 'monuments' (a term famously associated with Paul Zumthor but which is also Sainte-Beuve's in the passage quoted above), than as 'documents'.[40] Gaston's project, or more accurately his practice, was not bereft of paradoxes and contradictions. Despite staking all on a dispassionately neutral 'science' of historical understanding, he was quite capable of using the medieval corpus as the occasion for providentialist reveries on the nature and origins of national identity, and, ironically, in his 1870 lecture on Roland and 'la nationalité française' he attacked Germany in the name of the very same populist–patriotic arguments that the German philologists and medievalists had themselves forged.[41] Nevertheless, a major paradigm shift took place in the transition from the reign of the father to the empire of the son. Sainte-Beuve, while respectful of the new historical–philological approach to literary study (and to which, in its own way,

[39] Gaston Paris, 'Paulin Paris et le littérature française du moyen âge', 219.

[40] See Hult, 'Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love', 205. In *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), Sainte-Beuve defines criticism as, if not exclusively, then principally concerned with 'les monuments de l'esprit' (i. 22).

[41] On the relation of Gaston Paris to romantic populism, collective oral traditions, and the life of the 'people', see Nichols, 'Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies', 33.

his work was itself a contribution), always maintained the ultimate primacy of the appreciative model. But this in turn raised a further problem: what, in respect of medieval literature, would count as a plausible appreciative judgement?

In this connection, there is a further encounter with Paulin Paris, exactly thirty years later, but this time the tone is far less amiable. It concerns the genre of the medieval mystery play (in particular *Le Mystère du siège d'Orléans*). It is unclear why Sainte-Beuve chose to wander into this relatively arcane corner of French literary history and even less clear why he chose to do so in such detail (a sequence of three articles). Most of it is summary, but the interspersed critical comments reveal a quite different purpose, evaluative rather than merely synoptic. The governing critical perspective rests on the contrast of two dramatic traditions, that of the medieval mystery play and that of French tragedy from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century:

> Le théâtre français, dans sa partie sérieuse, émouvante et pathétique, dans ce qui n'est pas la comédie, a déjà eu une double existence bien distincte et qu'on peut dire accomplie. L'ancien théâtre, qui ne compte pas moins de trois siècles pleins, depuis le XIIe siècle jusqu'au XIVe siècle a eu les *Mystères*: le théâtre classique, qui embrasse à peu près la même durée (un peu moins) du XVIe siècle au XIXe siècle, a eu la *tragédie*.
>
> French theatre, in its serious, stirring and moving aspect, in what does not belong to the genre of comedy, has already had two quite distinct and completed lives. Ancient theatre, which stretches over no less than three centuries, from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, had the *mystery plays*: classical theatre, which embraces more or less the same time span (a little less) from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, has *tragedy*.

This merely states (a version of) the facts, but then comes the moment of comparative appraisal:

> Ces deux formes si inégales ont éprouvé chez nous des destinées bien différentes: la dernière, une des plus nobles formes de l'art, une des créations choisies de l'esprit humain, a fourni d'immortels chefs-d'œuvre et a mis pour jamais en lumière les noms les plus glorieux de notre littérature et de notre poésie; l'autre forme, au contraire, n'a promu à la célébrité (au moins chez nous) aucun nom d'auteur et de poète, et n'a laissé, quoi qu'on s'efforce aujourd'hui pour être juste, que des œuvres sans élévation, sans action durable et féconde.
>
> These two very unequal forms have had quite different fates in our country: the latter, one of the noblest of art forms, one of the select creations of the human mind, has furnished immortal masterpieces and showcased for all time the most glorious names of our literature and our poetry; the other, by contrast, has, at least here, produced no famous names of writer and poet, and, notwithstanding contemporary efforts

to be just, has bequeathed only works lacking in stature, without fertile and durable influence.[42]

We thus have two forms and two traditions ('la glorieuse et la triviale'), the triviality of the latter exacerbated by what happens to it as it passes from the twelfth century to the fourteenth century. The mystery play was originally part of sacred liturgy, performed in Latin within the precincts of the church. It later moves out into the 'street', becomes popular, with a corresponding invasion of the Latin text by the vernacular, whether Provençal or 'French'. While this represents a gain in access, it relatedly entails a diminution of beauty and gravity:

Nous voilà tombés dans la rue et dans le populaire; adieu la belle liturgie! Toute la gravité du latin a disparu … Ce n'est plus cette liturgie dramatique du chœur et du sanctuaire où éclate en hymnes si richement rimées et comme en rosaces magnifiques le talent et le bel esprit d'un saint Bernard; c'est déjà le régal et l'émotion de la foule. Le premier venu y prend sa part.

Here we find ourselves relegated to the street and the popular; farewell beautiful liturgy! All the solemnity of Latin has disappeared … It is no longer that dramatic liturgy of the choir and the sanctuary where the talent and fine mind of a Saint Bernard burst forth in such richly rhymed hymns and magnificent rosaces; the indulgence and emotion of the crowd have already taken over. The first-comer now has his place.[43]

What both pains and baffles Sainte-Beuve in Paulin's approach is that he collapses essential distinctions and discriminations by suggesting that the style of the *mystère* is comparable to that of Virgil and the Greek tragedians. Here Sainte-Beuve's disagreement shades into outright exasperation:

C'est précisément ce dont je me plains: plusieurs de ces érudits en moyen âge, et de ceux qui se sont les premiers lancés dans cette voie, n'avaient pas et n'ont pas en eux tous les termes voulus de comparaison … Je ne demande pas mieux d'oublier la Grèce quand on me parle du moyen âge. Mais qu'on ne vienne pas soi-même provoquer la comparaison par des préférences ou des vanteries injustifiables.

This is precisely my complaint: several of these medieval scholars, amongst them those who first embarked down this road, did not and do not have the required terms of comparison … It is fine by me to forget Greece when speaking of the Middle Ages. But please do not yourselves provoke that very comparison with unjustifiable preferences and boastings.[44]

This is the 'appreciative' mode in full flow, comprising a set of three interconnected judgements, all of which are designed to illuminate what goes

[42] *NL* iii. 353–4. [43] *NL* iii. 368.

[44] *NL* iii. 384, 396. Paulin Paris did not take kindly to being lectured by Sainte-Beuve on the issue of 'taste' (see Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature*, 100).

wrong with such a mode in Paulin's over-inflated assessment of the literary and dramatic virtues of the *mystère*. First, there is the comparative context in which one form (the medieval mystery play) is placed (and devalued) when looked at contrastively from the point of view of another form (tragedy from the sixteenth century). The source and measure of normative judgement are taken from a later development and projected back onto a preceding and inferior formation. Secondly, the fate of the mystery play as it moves from church to street, Latin to vernacular, is to lose whatever high cultural coherence it may once have possessed. The church provided a controlled space of ritual and, more importantly, Latin as the language of sacred liturgy. In other words, the dignity conferred on the form by its original Christian context may be said to have provided an equivalent of the regulatory systems of the classical canon. Once touched by the demotic, however, that equivalence is irretrievably lost.[45] This doubtless reflects Sainte-Beuve's enduring hostility to the invasion of the cultural sphere by popular literature and more broadly, where the nineteenth century is concerned, his fear of cultural democratization.[46] But it also presumably reflects a resistance not only to democracy but also to the type of romantic populism that, via Germany, had come to infect the scene of French medievalism. Thirdly, the strictly formal/generic contrast between the mystery play and tragedy also supports a more generalized judgement of medieval culture: it is not just the mystery play that is immature ('childish') but the times themselves to which it belongs.

In certain respects, this is a reprise of the story of decline and decay that Sainte-Beuve assigns specifically to the later Middle Ages, but it also points to something more wide-ranging. The articles on the mystery play sketch the lineaments of a literary history, in which the medieval period holds a somewhat troubled place. If the true 'beginning' of French literature is post-medieval, this is because the grip on Sainte-Beuve's thinking of the classical norm produces a blockage, which doubtless explains in large part why Sainte-Beuve has so little to say about medieval writing in general. The proffered options—romantic 'fervour' or positivist 'science'—seemed both to entail a surrender of the paradigm within which the very identity of criticism itself was defined. The simplest move in the face of this blockage was simply to walk away (as in the abrupt quitting of Mme de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* for the altogether more congenial atmosphere of *Corinne*). Yet

[45] Erich Auerbach was to make of the separation of high Latin (as an essentially dead administrative language severed from contact with everyday life) and the Romance vernaculars (as spoken idioms without written forms and thus incapable of generating a literature) a major theme in his study of the Middle Ages (*Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (London, 1965), 261 ff.).

[46] See Ch. 8.

the 'question' of the Middle Ages could not be so easily dispatched, since it underlay more than just a literary debate about values or a scholarly debate about method. At a far more pervasive level, it engaged a theme that Sainte-Beuve could never forsake—the relation between the making of France and the legacy of Rome.[47] The Germanists had claimed the Teutonic origins of the French medieval epics, and, in making that claim, joined a more long-standing historiographical discussion concerning the origins of France and 'Frenchness', in which special emphasis had been given to the role of the Germanic invasions of the fifth century and the founding of the Merovingian dynasty. Beyond the technical issues of medievalist enquiry (appreciation versus understanding, judgement versus science) lay the far larger ones pertaining to the grounds of national 'identity'.

## II

In this respect, the challenge for Sainte-Beuve was not so much to avoid the French Middle Ages as to secure its threatened link with Latinity.[48] He was to do so on a number of fronts and by way of a set of preoccupations linking philology, literary history, and historiography, above all in the extended essay 'Du point de départ et des origines de la langue et de la littérature françaises' (like 'De la tradition', originally the text of lectures at the École Normale Supérieure). Since it was rare for Sainte-Beuve to dally in the metaphysically treacherous waters of origins discourse, it is important to note that 'origins' here does not mean 'absolute' origins in the sense of both ground and essence that informed the teleological constructions of the German thinkers ('les théories absolues des Allemands' (the absolute theories of the Germans), as

[47] The relation was claimed and marked inside the professional discipline of medieval studies in the introductory article, 'Romani, Romania, lingua romana, romancium', by Gaston Paris for the first issue (in 1872) of the journal *Romania* (the title it still carries today). Paris contrasted 'Romani' with 'Barbari' and 'Germani' ('les habitants de l'empire romain, quelle qu'eût été leur nationalité primitive, se désignaient, particulièrement par opposition aux étrangers et surtout aux Allemands, par le nom de *Romani*' (the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, whatever their original nationality, called themselves, especially as opposed to foreigners and above all the Germans, by the name of *Romani*) (p. 12)). The discipline of medieval Romance studies was accordingly cast as a recovery of a 'Latinate-Roman' origin of French cultural identity, held to embody the virtues of a rational, law-bound community as against the bonds of race and blood-line that ground 'les deux grandes nations des Germains et des Slaves'. For a detailed discussion of this text and its significance, see Simon Gaunt and Julian Weiss, 'Cultural Traffic in the Medieval Romance World', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 4/3 (2004), 2–6.

[48] He would doubtless have taken umbrage at Eckstein's assertion that 'all Europe, which was formerly Latin, is now Germanic' (quoted in Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 262).

Sainte-Beuve puts it).[49] 'Origins' carries a purely chronological meaning and as such is accompanied by a recognition of the arbitrariness of all positings of a beginning. If in the qualititative sense French literature 'begins' in the sixteenth century, this is, from the chronological point of view, its 'third or fourth beginning'. Grasped simply as a collection of writings and texts, what is now called 'son *vrai commencement*' (its *true beginning*) dates the origins of 'French' literature from well before not only the twelfth century but even the fifth century, the proof of which, according to Sainte-Beuve, is supplied by the five volumes of material included in the *Histoire littéraire de la France* by the Benedictines of the École de Chartes and subsequently the three volumes edited by Ampère.[50]

The reference to a pre-fifth-century body of work is, of course, a pointed one, and takes us immediately to the central task of presentation and explanation Sainte-Beuve set himself before the students at the École Normale Supérieure:

> Il est donc indispensable que j'établisse devant vous quelques faits antérieurs, que j'expose l'état de choses, et comment le français d'alors était né—un français intermédiaire et qui n'est pas encore tout à fait le nôtre, mais qui y mène par une route et une pente désormais ininterrompues.
>
> It is thus necessary that I put before you a number of early facts, that I present the state of affairs, and how French was born—an intermediate French not yet entirely our own but that leads to it along a route and down a slope henceforth uninterrupted.[51]

The task is 'indispensable' because designed to anchor the question of origins in Rome rather than Germania. 'Beginning' ('quand on commence …') means starting with the early rhetoricians and grammarians who formed 'une riche province de la culture latine, une province entièrement romaine depuis César' (a rich province of Latin culture, since Caesar an entirely Roman province): Antoine Gniphon, Valère Caton, Varron d'Atace, Cornelius Gallus, Trogue-Pompée, Domitius Afer, Marcus Aper, Favorinus, Fronton, and Petronius, in short 'les noms principaux des Gallo-Romains célèbres dans les lettres' (the main names of the famous Gallo-Romans in the field of letters).[52] Here Sainte-Beuve signals his readiness to enter the lists as a literary historian in the broader disciplinary arena that pitted the Gallo-Roman and the Frankish worlds against one another,

[49] *Pr.L.* iii. 115. Gaston Paris, in full nationalist mode, also distinguished between the categories of 'beginnings' and 'origins'. In his lecture 'Les Origines de la littérature française', he formulated his topic as both 'les origines *et* les commencements de la littérature française' (emphasis added), with a view to claiming that the former was not to be confused conceptually with the latter; 'origins' was to be understood in 'its full sense as identity … historical and genetic origins of a people' (Nichols, 'Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies', 33).

[50] *Pr.L.* iii. 73–4. [51] *Pr.L.* iii. 73. [52] *Pr.L.* iii. 75–7.

in a competitive struggle for the terms of a founding or legitimating myth.[53] As a 'point of departure'—let alone an 'indispensable' one—for a history of French literature, the list of Gallo-Roman names looks like a case of special pleading (Sainte-Beuve himself concedes that 'on est bien loin de la littérature française' (one is far removed from French literature)[54]), and indeed would be, were it not for the fact that Sainte-Beuve's main concern is in fact less with 'literature' as such than with language—namely, the 'birth' of French ('comment le français d'alors était né' (how the French of that time was born)); the question of the origins of French literature must itself originate as a question about the origins of French.

The account is easy to summarize, mainly because it is itself for the most part a summary of the work and views of others. The linguistic map of pre-Roman Gaul divides into three indigenous dialects (in this Sainte-Beuve follows Julius Caesar's observations): *aquitain*, *celtique*, *belge* (or *gaulois*). The conquest brings in its train the introduction and spread of Latin, or rather two species of Latin, the learned and the popular, the urban and the rustic (in this mirroring a division already present within ancient Rome), which, as they spread, gradually 'cover' (but do not obliterate) the original dialects, with the interesting twist of a tendency of the popular to move towards the idioms of the polite.[55] The Germanic invasions of the fifth century bring a medley of seven or eight new 'languages' in their train; and from the fifth to the tenth centuries the linguistic history is one of ongoing mixtures and adulterations. By the ninth century, Gaulish has long since been consigned to oblivion, Celtic confined to Brittany, and spoken Latin is dead. Strip out Brittany and the west Pyrenees (Basque), and what remains across the bulk of Gaul is *roman*, splitting regionally into 'français' ('langue d'œil') and 'provençal' ('langue d'oc'), both variants of Romance, a Gallo-Roman derivative of Latin, albeit not a 'pure' derivation.[56] The message then is clear: however complicated the actual process of linguistic evolution, the underlying history (and the lesson for the students to take away) is, so to speak, the story of a postcard sent from ancient Rome, which, although over time multiply stamped and inscribed, transmits to the present a requirement: 'la connaissance approfondie de la latinité—de toutes les latinités. Je ne suis et ne puis être que le doigt qui

[53] He already hints at this in 'De la tradition': 'La littérature chevaleresque elle-même, que nous voyons s'épanouir pour la première fois dans sa précoce et brillante expansion au midi de notre France, au bord de la Méditerranée, semble avoir été effleuvée, caressée de quelque souffle lointain venu des antiques rivages et qui a pu apporter quelque invisible semence' (Courtly literature itself, whose first, precociously brilliant blossoming we see in our own south of France, by the Mediterranean, appears to have been released, caressed by some distant breath of inspiration from antique shores, which may have borne some invisible seed) (*CL* xv. 361).

[54] *Pr.L.* iii. 77. [55] *Pr.L.* iii. 95. [56] *Pr.L.* iii. 127 ff.

indique le chemin' (the thorough knowledge of Latinity—of all Latinities. I am and can be only the finger pointing the way).[57] As Sainte-Beuve's casting of his pedagogical role in the image of the pointing finger implies, there is nothing in these reflections on linguistic origins (or what Sainte-Beuve identifies as certain 'questions de linguistique nationale'[58]) that is itself original. They constitute rather a digest of contemporary research or, as Glencross puts it, 'a narrative history of medieval linguistic scholarship,'[59] albeit one oriented to a particular set of desired outcomes. The conspectus is dominated in particular by four French proper names: Fauriel, Raynouard, Ampère, and Littré. That they are all French (with, however, also an acknowledgement of the crucial figure of Friedrich Diez[60]) is itself indicative of the extent to which Sainte-Beuve construes the project of a 'linguistique nationale' as 'un genre de critique bien essentielle pour contre-balancer les théories absolues des Allemands' (a form of critique essential to counter-balancing the absolute theories of the Germans).[61] At first sight this may seem less a counter-balancing than the flip side of the same nationalist coin. There is in addition an occasional whiff of the Germanist idea of language as the transmission of the 'genius' of a race ('l'historien littéraire, sagace et un peu subtil comme l'est M. Ampère, a droit de faire remarquer que le génie des lieux et des races se maintient et subsiste à travers les siècles' (the literary historian, sagacious and relatively subtle in the manner of M. Ampère, is entitled to observe that the genius of places and races persists and subsists across the centuries)[62]).

On the other hand, there is also much that genuinely counter-balances. As previously noted, Sainte-Beuve was strongly opposed to any version of a nation's linguistic history based on the model of 'purity', and, by the same token, the infection of scholarship by excessive patriotism. This is the gist of his one major reservation regarding the otherwise much-admired figure of Raynouard, who not only positioned Provençal and French as a derivative of Latin, but did so in terms that claimed for the former a privileged position as a kind of *Ursprache* furnishing a generative matrix for all the languages of the Romance family. This hypothesis, according to Sainte-Beuve, now lies in 'ruins'. Provençal was not a 'mother' language at all, but a sister of all the others, and, if Raynouard was tempted into thinking otherwise (seeking to model a syntax of Provençal in accordance with the grammar of Latin),

[57] *Pr.L.* iii. 129. See also the articles on Viollet-le-Duc, where Sainte-Beuve foregrounds a Latin and Gallo-Roman history, from its despoliation by the barbarians ('on lui fit subir tous les outrages de la grossièrté et de la barbarie' (it was subjected to all the outrages of rudeness and barbarism)) to the later emergence—miraculous or at least inexplicable—of a common national language in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (*NL* vii. 177–8).

[58] *Pr.L.* iii. 115. [59] Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 87.

[60] *Pr.L.* iii. 122. [61] *Pr.L.* iii. 115. [62] *Pr.L.* iii. 77.

this was due to a 'prétention excessive' stemming from his 'patriotisme méridional'.[63] One of the virtues of the work of both Ampère and Littré was to correct and refine the one-sided nature of Raynouard's thinking (Ampère, we recall, is commended for being 'le contraire du chauvinisme en literature' (the opposite of literary chauvinism)[64]). Littré in particular went where Raynouard proudly refused to go, across the Rhine for inspiration ('on lui doit d'avoir enfin un pont régulier établi entre la philologie d'outre-Rhin s'appliquant aux langues romanes et la pratique française' (it is to him that we are indebted for having established a steady bridge permitting the application of German philology to the Romance languages and the philological endeavours of the French)[65]). This is in fact a somewhat modest representation of Littré's debt to Germany (and Diez in particular). Littré's ambition was to outdo the Germans by means of a stunning reverse application of their assumptions and methods. He assimilated the Indo-European hypothesis, while arguing that Latin (rather than Greek) was the ancient language closest to Sanskrit, and that the Gallic languages, especially French, as the closest kin of Latin, were the exemplary modern instantiations of the Aryanist type. As Stephen Nichols remarks, 'for philological *chutzpah*, Littré can have few peers'.[66] Here we see the Gallo-centric universe come full circle: whether locked with Raynouard inside the self-confirming world of a latinized Provençal or travelling with Littré on a raiding party designed as *plus germaniste que les germanistes*, we come back to a common emphasis: the unbreakable link tying French to Latinate origins.

## III

Claude Fauriel also belongs in this company, sharing in both its virtues and its faults. Although Sainte-Beuve describes him as 'un esprit plus ouvert et plus

[63] *Pr.L.* iii. 110. In the article on Raynouard, Sainte-Beuve maintained that Raynouard's thesis of Latin-derived Provençal as the 'mother' of modern French and the Romance languages generally is weak, and that Provençal is better seen as an elder sister, influential but not a maternal source (*CL* v. 18–20). In his *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençales*, A. W. Schlegel attacked Raynouard on Provençal as the origin of the whole Romance family, while accepting that it was the principal source for French (see Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 45). Max Müller later demolished Raynouard's thesis (*Lectures on the Science of Language* (London, 1861)).

[64] *NL* xiii. 226. [65] *Pr.L.* iii. 120.

[66] Nichols, 'Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies', 35. Sainte-Beuve echoed Littré's view in stressing that, in the formation of French out of Latin, the 'immixition germanique' (Germanic interference) was a mere epiphenomenon, 'une perturbation accidentelle et superficielle' (a contingent and superficial disruption) (*NL* v. 244).

philosophique' than Raynouard, he also charges Fauriel with being inclined to overestimate the importance of Provençal and the Mediterranean world generally to the formation of both French and France ('il a trop accordé peut-être aux grandes compositions provençales … il a mis l'invention trop absolument du côté des troubadours' (he perhaps accorded too much to the great Provençal compositions … he placed invention too categorically on the side of the troubadours)).[67] Yet if I take Fauriel last, it is because a special place must be reserved for him in both Sainte-Beuve's thought and his affections, above all as reflected in the sequence of four articles published in 1845. Over twenty years later, in his article on Jean-Jacques Ampère, Sainte-Beuve sought to distil his opinion of the significance of Fauriel by situating him as the unacknowledged founder of the comparative method in literary history: 'La branche d'étude qui est comprise sous le titre de littérature comparée ne date en France que du commencement de ce siècle … ce fut surtout le modeste, savant et désintéressé Fauriel qui fonda réellement chez nous cette étude méthodique et approfondie' (The branch of study that falls under the heading of comparative literature dates in France only from the beginning of this century … it was above all the modest, learned, and disinterested Fauriel who truly founded here this form of methodical, in-depth study).[68] If he remained unacknowledged outside a small circle of colleagues and acquaintances, this was because his prodigious erudition—ranging freely across languages and literatures from Provençal and Sanskrit to modern Greek—did not materialize in a commensurate body of published work. Fauriel's preferred mode was oral, whether in his public lectures as professor of foreign literatures at the Sorbonne or more informally in the endless conversations he had variously among the Auteuil group of *Idéologues*, within the Coppet circle of Mme de Staël and Benjamin Constant and then later, during the Restoration and the July Monarchy, as an habitué of several 'liberal' intellectual and literary salons in Paris.

These biographical facts—which Sainte-Beuve naturally dwells on at some length—are not unrelated to the complex inner shape and tenor of Fauriel's scholarly career. On the one hand, the priority—both temporal and qualitative—of oral poetry over the written form remained a constant theme of his enquiries into the origins of literary cultures, seen as issuing not from a literate elite but from a continuous popular tradition. As the translator of some of the 'Ossian' poems, advocate of the song-based or 'cantilene' theory of epic, or contributor to the 'bardic' school of Homeric studies, Fauriel seemed to be aligning himself unequivocally with the Germans, an association further strengthened by his Sanskrit interests (he wrote on Indic philosophy in the *Décade philosophique*, lent a hand in setting up the Société Asiatique, in whose journal

[67] *PC* iv. 110. [68] *NL* xiii. 184–5.

he published a review of the *Indische Bibilothek* by A. W. Schlegel, who in turn entrusted him with the Persian manuscripts of the *Bhagavad Gita* Schlegel was planning to translate into Latin,[69] while in his own early researches into the Arthurian cycle he postulated a set of links with Hindu myth in terms that supported the hypothesis of the 'Asiatic origins of the peoples of Europe').[70]

Yet to see Fauriel as exclusively of the Germanist party would be both to reduce the complexity of his thought and to misconstrue the significance of his historical moment (he was, for example, to reprimand Charles de Villers for his excessive Germanophilia on grounds that, as Sainte-Beuve notes, came straight out of the Auteuil stable[71]). His closeness to Cabanis and the sceptical temper of the *Idéologues* should already serve notice that here was a mind as much attuned to Enlightenment rationalism and cosmopolitanism as to Romantic primitivism and folk nationalism. Like Mme de Staël, and in some respects even more so, Fauriel was a crossroads or straddling figure, on the cusp of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The opening pages of Sainte-Beuve's portrait are devoted to describing the confluences at this historical crossroads, in what is one of his most brilliantly condensed exercises in intellectual history. The very first sentence takes us into a scenario of 'rupture', of break between 'deux régimes intellectuels', the older 'parti philosophique' of the eighteenth century and the newer 'historical' school of the nineteenth century: 'Le XVIIIe siècle finissait, et le XIXe s'annonçait par une éclatante rupture' (The eighteenth century was coming to a close, and the nineteenth century announced its arrival with a shattering rupture).[72] The truly startling move, however, lies not simply in positioning Fauriel—along with Mme de Staël and Benjamin Constant—in the zone of transition, but in claiming that Fauriel—endlessly hiding his light under a bushel—*is* the Transition incarnate: 'M. Fauriel … nous représente le XVIIIe siècle devenant naturellement le XIXe … Pour qui veut étudier les origines du XIXe siècle dans toutes ses branches, et comme dans ses racines, il faut s'adresser de près à M. Fauriel (M. Fauriel … represents for us the eighteenth century turning naturally into the nineteenth century … Whoever wishes to study the origins of the nineteenth century in all its branches, and its apparent roots, must closely address M. Fauriel).[73]

The account of the transition, moreover, is subtle (notwithstanding the naive self-evidence of the adverb *naturellement*): it is not that, with Fauriel, Staël,

[69] Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 318.

[70] Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 121. Bédier, whose impatience with Fauriel knew few bounds, placed him squarely in the camp of Herder and Grimm. Babbitt describes Fauriel as 'a sort of French Herder' (*The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston, 1940), 33).

[71] *PC* iv. 188. For a detailed account of Fauriel's differences with Villers, see Pierre Deguise, *Benjamin Constant méconnu: Le Livre 'De la Religion'* (Geneva, 1966), 81–5.

[72] *PC* iv. 125. [73] *PC* iv. 127.

and Constant, the eighteenth-century mentality of the 'parti philosophique' simply yields to the demands of the new 'génie historique'.[74] The transition is not just 'rupture', the replacement of one paradigm by another, but rather the altogether more complex and difficult enterprise of holding onto elements of the old while engineering a divorce from the latter in order to take up abode in the new; the 'parti philosophique' was, Sainte-Beuve tells us, a group 'qui, pour mieux continuer ce parti déjà vieux, méditait à son tour de faire divorce avec lui' (who, in order the better to continue this already well-established line, considered in turn arranging a divorce from it).[75] As for Fauriel himself, the more nuanced account decisively modifies the inaugural break narrative by emphasizing a continuing fidelity to the eighteenth century:

> En même temps nous le saisissons bien exactement dans son progrès d'esprit, dans sa marche propre, tenant encore par ses racines au XVIIIe siècle, et lui qui va devenir si *historique* de méthode, et qui l'est déjà, nous le surprenons quelque peu *idéologue* encore jusque dans l'appréciation de l'histoire. Fauriel a eu cela de particulier et d'original, nous ne saurions assez le rappeler, qu'issu du pur XVIIIe siècle et comme en le prolongeant, il a rencontré et entamé presque toutes les recherches du XIXe siècle, sans avoir dit à aucun jour: *Je romps*.
>
> At the same time we grasp precisely the progress of his thought, in its unfolding development, still rooted in the eighteenth century, and he who was to become so *historical* in method, who has become it already, surprises us as being something of an *ideologue* even in the appreciation of history. We cannot recall too often that what was particular and original about Fauriel is that, issuing exclusively from the eighteenth century and, as it were, prolonging it, he encountered and initiated almost all the researches of the nineteenth century, without ever once saying: *I break*.[76]

If we need to spend some time with Sainte-Beuve's portrait of Fauriel, it is because it is in this space of overlap and transition that we can best grasp the larger issues bound up with the place of Sainte-Beuve's reckoning with the Middle Ages in the campaign to link the culture of the classic in France with the example of ancient Rome and the heritage of Latinity. The meaning and value of Fauriel's transitional quality in particular can be gauged by returning to, and elaborating on, the term 'comparative' in Sainte-Beuve's later ascription to Fauriel of a founding role in the practice of comparative literature. In a first moment, the term of course will invoke the turn-of-the-century ferment around the emerging discipline of comparative philology. In 1818 Fauriel published, in the *Archives philosophiques*, a thirty-page review of Bopp's *Comparative Grammar* (the first edition of which had appeared in 1816). The broad conceptual—'philosophical' in the classically eighteenth-century sense—frame of the review was supplied by the contrasting terms of 'general'

[74] *PC* iv. 129. [75] *PC* iv. 125. [76] *PC* iv. 178.

and 'comparative' grammar. The former belonged in the older regime of Enlightenment universalism, the latter to the romantic obsession with origins, ethnicities, and cultural difference. The interest of Fauriel's discussion of Bopp lies in his effort to transcend the contrast between general and comparative grammar by marrying the two approaches, but as a marriage in which what comes first—remains foundational—is the study of languages 'qui a pour objet la connaissance des opérations élémentaires de l'entendement' (whose object is knowledge of the elementary operations of understanding); for Fauriel the value of Bopp's enquiries consists in their bringing to light evidence of 'une loi de l'esprit humain' (a law of the human mind) (a correlate of which in the political sphere is a 'parenté des nations' (kinship of nations)).[77] This prioritizing of the general over the comparative within the proposed alliance of the two is pure Condillac as carried over into the work of the *Idéologues*, and most certainly does not go down the path trail-blazed by the Schlegels and their acolytes.

It was to prove an unsustainable marriage, the separation ultimately settled on terms highly favourable to the new difference-oriented comparatism. The failure was written from the word go into the contradictory scenario of keeping one foot in the Enlightenment while entering the nineteenth century with the other, and in his subsequent work on languages and literatures Fauriel will gravitate more to difference in the form of the local, the regional, and the national. Yet even here the stress on commonality ('parenté') remained. Sainte-Beuve is quite right in associating Fauriel's literary and philological research with an advanced taste for 'origins' in the Germanist manner ('Il aimait en tout à étudier, à saisir les origines, les fleuves à leur source, les civilisations à leur naissance, les poésies sous leurs formes primitives' (In all things he liked to study, to grasp origins, rivers at their source, civilizations at their birth, literatures in their primitive forms)[78]), but this reflected more a methodological principle than an ideological *parti pris*. The study of origins was but a prelude to an immersion in the phenomenon of *diffusion* (the real basis of the nineteenth-century discipline of comparative literature[79]). Fauriel was concerned more with how forms and genres travelled across borders, with their spread rather than their birth. In this we hear more than a faint echo of eighteenth-century cosmopolitan values (Sainte-Beuve appositely describes him as 'le premier critique français *qui soit sorti de chez lui*' (the first French critic *to leave home*)).[80] This was further buttressed by a preoccupation with

[77] Quoted in Michel Espagne, 'Claude Fauriel en quête d'une méthode, ou l'Idéologie à l'écoute de l'Allemagne', *Romantisme*, 73 (1991), 14.

[78] *PC* iv. 132.

[79] Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 126.

[80] *PC* iv. 164.

the collective cultural resources of a 'people', where the content of the term 'people' was less ethnic than democratic, inspired more by a republican idea of citizenship than a romantic celebration of tribe or nation.[81] When Sainte-Beuve says that Fauriel 'resta toujours républicain au fond' (always remained at heart a republican),[82] he did not mean solely an attachment to the principles of '89, although this was part of what he meant ('Fauriel était sincèrement attaché aux principes de la révolution' (Fauriel was sincerely attached to the principles of the revolution),[83]): he also understood something broader and deeper, a whole way of looking at the historical world shaped by an attitude that had its roots in the Enlightenment.

The area of scholarly work in which these diverse strands of Fauriel's formation were woven together was medieval Provence, in particular his consensus-challenging theory, developed in his public lectures, of the Provençal origins of the *chansons de geste* (although Fauriel himself did not use the latter term). Fauriel's thesis was twofold. First, that both the Carolingian and the Arthurian cycles originated in meridonal Gaul, later spreading out from South to North (thus inverting the priorities normally granted to *langue d'œil* over *langue d'oc*, as well as the precedence of the *Nibelungenlied*). This resembled a 'regionalist' thesis provocatively testing the legitimacy of the 'nationalist' thesis that underpinned mainstream medievalist thinking about the epic (and most notably the *Chanson de Roland*), but in fact 'regionalist' would be a misnomer, since the real point of the thesis was to provide a starting point for a diffusionist analysis, whose scope was to be European in scale. In one of the lectures he made a categorical distinction between 'deux espèces' of epic, those that were 'strictement locaux et nationaux' (which he proposed to leave entirely on one side), and those that were 'cosmopolites', which were to be found 'chez toutes les nations de l'Europe … Ils forment, dans la littérature épique du moyen âge, comme un fonds général, commun à l'Europe entière' (in all the nations of Europe … They constitute, in the epic literature of the Middle Ages, a sort of general stock, common to the whole of Europe).[84] Secondly, Fauriel accords precedence—in both time and importance—to the Carolingian cycle over the Arthurian. This

[81] Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 125.

[82] *PC* iv. 134. [83] *PC* iv. 139.

[84] Quoted in Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 125. Even Bédier, who classified Fauriel with the German tradition of Herder, acknowledged that Fauriel differed from the romantics in his attachment to the Enlightenment: 'Fauriel, en homme du XVIIIe siècle qu'il restait malgré tout, en vieil "idéologue" impénitent, avait gardé, dans l'expression des mêmes pensées, cette mesure classique et cette réserve qui étaient de ton dans la société d'Auteuil' (Fauriel, as the man of the eighteenth century that, despite all, he remained, as the old unrepentant 'idéologue', retained in these very same thoughts, that classical measure and reserve that defined the tone of the Auteuil gatherings) (*Les Légendes épiques* (4 vols.; Paris, 1926–9), iii. 230).

was no mere exercise in antiquarian dating. Fauriel's most controversial argument rested on fragmentary evidence for the existence of a 'lost' primitive version of the Carolingian epics that was allegedly the spontaneous creation of a popular oral culture. The Carolingian cycle originates as a work of the 'people', but in the democratic–republican sense rather than the ethno-nationalist sense of the term, whereas the later Arthurian poems were sophisticated written texts addressed to and expressing the aspirations of a feudal nobility.[85]

In this injection of 'class' into the analysis of the literary culture of medieval Gaul we hear echoes of what Augustin Thierry was to undertake far more systematically in connection with its social and political history (by the early 1830s, when the lectures on Provençal poetry were given, Fauriel and Thierry had become close friends). Sainte-Beuve will in due course take us to the relationship between the two men and, more abstractly, to the conjunction of philology and historiography, though not without a curious reluctance that will call for some comment. In the meantime, where Fauriel's views on medieval poetry were concerned, Sainte-Beuve highlights the centrality accorded to Provence. He does so in terms that implicitly reactivate the contextualizing observations with which the portrait begins (Fauriel's debt to the 'philosophical' spirit of the eighteenth century): Fauriel's account of medieval Provence is fuelled not by an 'esprit de patriotisme local' (a spirit of local patriotism) but by 'une vue éminemment philosophique' (an eminently philosophical view), the drift of which is to posit Provence as no less than the origin of modernity ('Il pensait que c'est de là qu'il faut dater l'histoire des littératures et des sociétés modernes' (He thought that it was from there that one must date the history of modern literatures and societies)).[86] It is, however, a truncated reactivation, and its yield is poor. Sainte-Beuve skates rapidly over the more controversial aspects of Fauriel's 'republican' theory of medieval epic. The complex balancing of Enlightenment and Romantic perspectives sketched at the beginning of the portrait gives way to a version of Fauriel as an out-and-out primitivist ('Fauriel était amoureux du primitif en littérature' (Fauriel was enamoured of the primitive in literature)[87]), increasingly obsessed with questions of 'origins' in a manner that, however 'philosophically' inflected, suggests an intellectual defection to Germany.

[85] Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 129. The theory of the Provençal origins of the *chansons de geste* appears to have a basis in fact, although the theory continued to be pursued throughout the twentieth century largely by Belgian and American scholars (significantly it has been more or less abandoned by French scholars, presumably from the ongoing pressure of the nationalist agendas). I am indebted to Simon Gaunt for this point.

[86] *PC* iv. 205. [87] *PC* iv. 230.

To some extent this matches the actual trajectory of Fauriel's career, in which the productive tension between the 'generalist' and 'comparatist' approaches described in the review of Bopp was gradually effaced. But there is clearly something more going on here than a simple characterization. Beneath the impartiality, and the generosity, of Sainte-Beuve's tribute to Fauriel something rankles, and it is not long before it comes to the surface—the instinctive repugnance that the 'classicist' in Sainte-Beuve feels before a disproportionate over-valuing of the 'primitive'. Fauriel is not only a pioneer of the modern historical method in comparative literary study. He also remains, commendably, wedded to the principles of appreciative criticism:

> et, remarquons-le, il ne se contentait pas de dégager par une analyse habile ce qu'il pouvait y avoir d'historique dans ces premiers chants lyriques, dans ces fragments romanesques, et de le mettre à nu; il sentait vivement aussi le charme du poétique qui s'y trouvait mêlé … L'homme de goût, l'homme délicat et sensible se retrouvait jusque dans l'érudit en quête du fond et dans l'investigateur des mœurs simples.
>
> and, let it be noted, he did not content himself with extracting by means of skilful analysis everything historical that could found in these first lyric songs, in these narrative fragments, in order to lay it bare; he also felt intensely the poetic charm invested in them … The man of taste, the man of delicate sensibility, was there at the very core of the scholar in search of this background and in the investigation of simple customs.[88]

But, as with Paulin Paris, it is appreciative energy to some extent misdirected or, more exactly, entailing a disequilibrium of judgement. In his enthusiasm for origins, oralities, and 'peoples', Fauriel lacks a sense of what for Sainte-Beuve it is crucial to have: 'aussi Fauriel put-il sembler quelquefois ne pas faire assez de cas des époques littéraires constituées et donner ouvertment la préférence à des âges trop nus … Je ne nierai donc pas qu'il n'y eût chez Fauriel quelque excès et quelque trace de rigueur dans ce retour à la simplicité' (Fauriel as well sometimes appeared to pay insufficient attention to constituted literary epochs and openly to display a preference for more primitive times … I will therefore not deny that there was in Fauriel a certain excess and a certain rigidity in this return to simplicity).[89]

This is one of the very few occasions in the text on Fauriel where Sainte-Beuve permits himself a negative personal view, but it is more than the standard caveat of judicious critique (impartiality as the inclusion of both pluses and minuses). It is another kind of 'crossroads', a parting of the ways, the juncture at which neutral portraiture is supplanted by an agenda. Fauriel's

[88] *PC* iv. 230. [89] *PC* iv. 230–1.

democratic–popular Gaul and Sainte-Beuve's centralized–normative seventeenth century ('constituted' in no small measure by the commanding figure of Louis XIV[90]) reflect different conceptions of a flourishing literary culture. There is also a politics here, which shows its face even more overtly when Sainte-Beuve finally turns his attention to Fauriel qua historian, whose four-volume *Histoire de la Gaule méridionale sous la domination des conquérants germains* (part of what was originally conceived as a much vaster project that Fauriel did not complete) appeared in 1836. This is where Fauriel joined forces with Thierry in the great historiographical debate over the forging of the 'identity' of France.

[90] 'C'était un romantique aussi que ce Fauriel qui considérait volontiers tous les siècles de Louis XIV comme non avenus, et qui, bien loin de tous les Versailles, s'en allait chercher, dans les sentiers les plus agrestes et les plus abandonnés, des fleurs de poésie toute simple, toute populaire, mais d'une vierge et forte senteur' (It was also the romantic in Fauriel who willingly regarded all the ages in the style of Louis XIV as not having occurred, and who, emphatically distant from all Versailles, wandered down the most neglected rustic byways in search of the simpler sort of poetic garlands, the truly popular, but with a fresh and strong scent) (*CL* xiv. 72).

# 7

# Romans, Gauls, and Franks

## I

The historical context of the debate was Roman Gaul at the time of the fifth-century Teutonic invasions, and the ideological fulcrum the competing claims of the Romanist and the Frankish narratives on the origins and ownership of liberty and sovereignty.[1] The pro-Frankish narrative, of course, had a pedigree going back to the sixteenth century and François Hotman's 'proto-republican' *Franco-Gallia*, which, in a bid to contain the arbitrary exercise of monarchical power, hailed the Franks (along with the pre-Roman Gauls) as the bringers, or rather the restorers, of Teutonic liberty. But, if there was a 'republican' impulse at work in the telling and retelling of this story from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, its main purpose had always been, and even in the early nineteenth century remained, that of ratifying the autonomy of a feudal aristocracy. Its principal spokesman was Henri de Boulainvilliers, whose

[1] The staging of these conflictual narratives in fact masks an irony. In the sixteenth century there were many stories in circulation concerning the alleged Trojan origins of the Frankish invaders. The latter thus founded a nation and a state in the same manner, or from the same sources, as Aeneas' founding of Rome; the Frankish narrative has the same pedigree as Virgil's epic. Designed in practice to usurp the authority of Rome over Gaul, in terms of legitimating myth it resembles its adversary. These curious paradoxes and their historical meanings have been discussed at length by Michel Foucault, *'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (London, 2004), 115–38. In addition to the competing Romanist and Frankish legitimation stories, there was a third, based on claims to Celtic origins. This was basically a 'secessionist' narrative, operating at the margins of the two great competitors, positing both the Roman and the Germanic invasions as catastrophes visited upon an autotochthonous Celtic 'nation'. Initially anti-Romanist (the Celts as the victims of the Roman invader), it became a point of resistance to, or rather rivalry with, Teutonic mania, displaying the same ideological structure uniting language, culture, and race (see Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London, 1995), 257). The most famous nineteenth-century literary Celt was Chateaubriand's Velléda in *Les Martyrs*, whom Georg Brandes somewhat rashly described as 'a Gallic maiden of the third century, and in her Chateaubriand depicts the French national type' (*Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (New York, n.d.), iii. 224). Yet, however rash, in the course of the nineteenth century this view of the Celt as quintessentially 'French' attracted a wide variety of adherents (including Augustin Thierry's brother, Amédée) and housed a multiplicity of different points of view—from the 'republican' perspective of Quinet, early Michelet, and

*Histoire de l'ancien gouvernment de la France* and *Essais sur la noblesse* (both published after his death in 1722) argued that the constitution of 'France' and 'Frenchness' emerged by right of conquest from the Frankish invasions. The 'nation' originates with the power of a military caste and is sustained by the authority of a sovereign baronial class. France, in short, was 'free' for so long as it was German, until turned upside down and wrecked by the Capetian dynasty.

Boulainvilliers's history was winner's history or rather a nostalgic lament for, as well as an attempted resurrection of, a version of winner's history long since buried by the triumph of absolutism. It was nevertheless to enjoy a sort of afterlife in the historiography of the nineteenth-century Restoration (most notably in the writings of Montlosier and, in the field of literary history, Marchangy[2]). Thierry, as is well-known, rewrote the conquest story literally from top to bottom, by presenting it from the point of view of the vanquished—namely, the indigenous populations of Gallo-Roman civilization. The Frankish invasions were a catastrophic disruption of the civic institutions imported into Gaul by the *pax romana* and Roman law, above all the self-governing *municipia* that, phoenix-like, was to re-emerge in the form of the eleventh- and twelfth-century communes, as a counter to a feudal nobility whose privileges were secured by force of arms. Thierry cast the municipalities and the communes in the image of a suppressed and expropriated Third Estate (the shadow of 1789 falling retrospectively over the whole of Thierry's medieval world[3]). The key text from this point of view was Lettre XIII ('Sur l'affranchissement des communes') of the *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1820), its historiographical vocabulary soaked in the idiom of emancipatory republicanism. The communes ('l'émancipation communale')

Henri Martin, to the nationalist disciples of Fustel de Coulanges after the Franco-Prussian war, most notably Camille Jullian. Fustel's views, however, were far more nuanced than those of his followers. He was resolutely opposed to the pro-Frankish theses of Boulainvilliers, but, while he argued in *La Gaule romaine* that the Celtic/Indo-European origins of Gaul were important and impressive ('une civilisation merveilleuse'), he always maintained that Rome was the key to the creation of a stable social order in Gaul. Since, however, Sainte-Beuve showed no interest whatsoever in the Celtic story, I leave it here to one side. For further details, see Krzysztof Pomian, 'Francs et Gaulois', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt. 3, *Les France* (Paris, 1992), 41–105; Mona Ozouf, 'Les Gaulois à Clermont-Ferrand' and 'L'Invention de l'ethnographie française: Le Questionnaire de l'Académie celtique', in *L'École de la France* (Paris, 1984), 339–79. On the Celtism of Quinet, Michelet, and Martin, see Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), 89 ff.

[2] On Montlosier, see Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 288–90; on Marchangy, see Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot*, 13–18.

[3] Thierry operated his own version of a teleological history whereby 1789 was 'written in' to the medieval Communes (see Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet* (London, 1993), 57).

were 'l'un des mouvements les plus énergiques de l'esprit de démocratie' (one of the most energetic impulsions of the democratic spirit), carrying forward 'presque tous les droits des anciennes républiques' (almost all the rights of the ancient republics), and expressing what had been understood 'dans l'antiquité par le mot *citoyen*' (in antiquity by the word *citizen*).[4]

This was the truly radical moment of Thierry's intervention and was to be substantially attenuated and blunted in Thierry's later, more accommodationist phase. The evolution of Thierry's thinking towards a more *juste-milieu* position, within which the original plebeian or *sans-culottiste* element of his medieval Third Estate ('les ouvriers ambulants, les petits marchands colporteurs et les paysans serfs de corps et de biens' (the itinerant workers, the small pedlar-merchants and the peasants bound to a condition of servitude)[5]) became a dwindling presence, is not our concern here. What should detain us is the affinity between Thierry and Fauriel, and what Sainte-Beuve makes of it. Thierry's influence on Fauriel was profound, but this was also a two-way track, as evidenced by the profusely complimentary acknowledgement, in the preface to *Essai sur l'histoire de la formation et des progrès du Tiers-Etat*, of the fruitful conversations he had with Fauriel in the early 1820s, especially on the interpretation of the original documents and sources ('tout ce qui rendait vivants pour moi mes vainqueurs et mes vaincus du XIe siècle' (everything that brought alive for me my victors and vanquished of the eleventh century)).[6] The descriptions and arguments of *Histoire de la Gaule méridionale* are virtually identical to those of Thierry, although—in tune with Fauriel's temperamental modesty—without the fierce republican rhetoric. Relatedly, Fauriel proposed an important modification—perhaps under the influence of the theories of the abbé du Bos—of the conquest model, according to which the Frankish invasions effected not so much a 'conquest', in the sense of the victors subjecting the vanquished to a new set of laws and customs, as either a ghetto-like separation of social orders or an assimilation of the victors to Gallo-Roman ways. But, even in this modified form, his declaration of general purpose and perspective in the 'Avertissement' remained pure Thierry:

> L'époque que j'ai voulu peindre dans les pays dont il s'agit m'a toujours paru l'une des plus importantes et les plus curieuses, non-seulement de l'histoire de la France, mais de celle de l'Europe … C'est durant cette époque, et là, dans les parties les plus mériodionales de la France, que se forme, pièce à pièce, tout un système de

[4] Augustin Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1874), 192–5. Thierry had been preceded by Sieyès, who, in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?*, had promoted the virtues of Roman Gaul in opposition to the Franks (see Chantal Grell, *Le 18e siècle et l'antiquité en France 1680–1789* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1995), ii. 1113 ff.).

[5] Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France*, 201.

[6] Augustin Thierry, *Dix ans d'histoire* (Paris, 1835), p. xxii.

civilisation originale, système dans lequel on voit les misérables débris de l'ancienne culture romaine s'empreindre, s'animer inopinément d'un nouvel esprit, se relever, se recomposer sous des formes nouvelles. C'est là et alors qu'on voit s'organiser dans les villes, sur les ruines de la curie romaine, un gouvernement municipal sous les influences duquel ces villes deviennent rapidement de petits États libres, des puissances républicaines qui … luttent avec énergie et avec succès contre les violences et les abus du pouvoir féodal.

The period I wished to depict in the relevant countries has always struck me as one of the most important and one of the most curious not merely in the history of France, but in that of Europe … It was during this period and in this place, in the southernmost regions of France, that bit by bit there developed a whole system of original civilization, a system in which we see the miserable debris of ancient Roman culture imprinted with, unexpectedly animated by, a new spirit, redress themselves, recompose themselves in new forms. It is then and there that we witness the organizing in the towns, on the ruins of the Roman *curia*, of a municipal government under the influence of which these towns rapidly become small free States, republican authorities which … struggle energetically and successfully against the violence and abuses of feudal power.[7]

The aspect of Sainte-Beuve's 'biographical' method that emphasized networks of friendship and acquaintanceship is put to useful work in the extended discussion of the relationship between Thierry and Fauriel (to which is added the figure of Manzoni). He cites Thierry's encomium to Fauriel, and draws parallels between them expressly designed to bring out their joint espousal of the Romanist thesis. Moreover, it is also here that Sainte-Beuve's own sympathies show themselves, if, as always, behind the cover of apparent neutrality. Fauriel's picture of 'ses pauvres vaincus du Midi' (his poor vanquished of the South),[8] the oppressed inheritors of 'l'état florissant de l'administration et de la civilisation romaine dans le midi de la Gaule au moment de la ruine commençante' (the flourishing state of Roman administration and civilization in southern Gaul at the moment ruin set in) declares an allegiance, that of 'l'historien qui, si impartial qu'il soit, se range manifestement pour les traditions romaines' (the historian who, however impartial, manifestly aligns himself with Roman traditions).[9] This partiality for the Romanist view has moreover a consequence (unshakeable resistance to the Germanist touting of the pro-Frankish narrative) that Sainte-Beuve is keen to stress, not least because it is a partiality that, for once in no uncertain terms, Sainte-Beuve himself demonstratively shares:

Plusieurs historiens modernes ont attribué quelques avantages à ces invasions de races franchement barbares à travers les races latines corrompues … M. Fauriel, malgré

[7] Claude Fauriel, *Histoire de la Gaule méridionale sous la domination des conquérants germains* (Paris, 1836), i, pp. vi–vii.

[8] *PC* iv. 243. [9] *PC* iv. 252.

les fréquentes discussions qu'il soutint à ce sujet avec ses amis, ne se laissa jamais entamer à leurs théories plus ou moins spécieuses; il était et il demeura foncièrement antigermanique, en ce sens qu'il n'admit jamais que ces violentes et brutales invasions fussent bonnes à quelque chose, même pour l'avenir éloigné d'une renaissance. Il considérait tout crûment les barbares germains et en particulier les Franks (je demande pardon de l'image, qui rend parfaitement ma pensée) comme une suite de durs cailloux à digérer.

Several modern historians have attributed certain advantages to the invasions by frankly barbarian races across the corrupted Latin races … M. Fauriel, despite the frequent discussions he sustained with his friends, never allowed himself to buy into their more or less specious theories; he was and remained thoroughly anti-Germanic, in the sense that he never conceded that these violent and brutal invasions were good for anything, even for the distant future of a renaissance. He viewed the German barbarians and in particular the Franks bluntly, as (forgive the image, which renders my thought perfectly) a series of stones difficult to digest.[10]

By Beuvian standards one could scarcely wish for a more ringing declaration of solidarity. Are we then to conclude that, in the sphere of medieval history and literary history, Sainte-Beuve's adherence to the Romanist party made of him, in the broad sense of the term, a 'republican'? When historicized after the manner of Thierry and Fauriel, is the place of Rome and Latinity in the forging of a national–cultural identity for modern France best understood in this way? But it is exactly when confronted, if only implicitly, with these questions that Sainte-Beuve turns to face in another direction, while entering a major reservation with regard to Fauriel's talents as a historian. It is 'dans l'application à la littérature et à la poésie' (in their application to literature and poetry) that Fauriel's historical gifts (his 'génie historique') show themselves to their best advantage, but 'lorsqu'il a abordé l'histoire pure' (when he tackled pure history) something is lacking 'pour remplir l'idée qu'on peut concevoir de l'historien complet' (to fulfil the idea we might conceive of the complete historian). The lack is partly technical ('certaines qualités d'exécution' (certain qualities of execution)), but above all it is the absence of any commitment

[10] *PC* iv. 253. Gibbon's history is praised for opposing 'ce grand tout continu et pacifique de l'Empire romain' (the great continuous and peaceable totality of the Roman Empire) to 'ces peuples dévastateurs' (those destructive peoples) with 'leurs racines et leurs sources asiatiques' (their Asiatic roots and origins) (*CL* viii. 434, 456). On the retrograde nature of Boulainvilliers's views as an embodiment of 'orgeuilleuses utopies rétrospectives, leurs amalgames de féodalité libérale et leurs anachronismes irréalisables' (proud retrospective utopias, their amalgams of liberal feudalism and their unachievable anachronisms), see *NL* ii. 149. In the article on the history of royalty in France, Sainte-Beuve was conspicuously hostile to the theory of the Asiatic–Germanic origins of monarchy (the theory of those who 'remontent beaucoup plus haut et nous transportent du premier pas aux plateaux les plus reculés de la mystérieuse Asie' (take us back much further in time and transport us with one step to the remotest plateaux of mysterious Asia) (PC iv. 6–7)).

to the great-men model of history writing ('une certaine vigueur de coup-d'œil peut-être dans l'appréciation des grands hommes' (a certain vigorous insight in the appreciation of great men)).[11] On Sainte-Beuve's reading, Fauriel's naturally democratic mind should have remained open to this dimension of history, but then—a point Sainte-Beuve was not well equipped to understand—it is precisely the democratic sensibility that explains the exclusion or backgrounding of which Sainte-Beuve here complains—namely, the relative eclipse from Fauriel's account of medieval Gaul of the figure of Charlemagne:

M. Fauriel est trop équitable pour ne point rendre à tout personnage historique la part qui lui revient, et pour sacrifier aucun aspect de son sujet. On a lieu toutefois de remarquer que Charlemagne ne grandit point dans ses récits; il n'y apparaît qu'un peu effacé et dans un lointain qui n'ajoute pas précisément à l'admiration … Il excelle à analyser et à recomposer le fond d'une époque, à suivre dans un état social troublé la part des vainqueurs, la part des vaincus … mais d'un homme et d'un grand homme, il hésite et tâtonne un peu.

M. Fauriel is too fair-minded not to accord to all historical characters what is due to them, or to sacrifice any aspect of his subject. Nevertheless there is occasion to remark that Charlemagne does not shine in his narratives; he appears in them as but a trifle effaced and sufficiently remote as not to enhance admiration … He excels in analysing and reconstituting the substance of a period, in tracking in a troubled social state what belongs to the victors and what to the vanquished … but in connection with a man, and a great man, he hesitates and fumbles.[12]

Given his sustained interest in the nineteenth-century historians, it is perhaps surprising that Sainte-Beuve never devoted an article to Thierry. But perhaps he felt that the piece he might have written was already there to be read in the text on Fauriel. Certainly everything he says about Fauriel's limitations as a historian he could have plausibly asserted about Thierry. Thierry's history was, avowedly and passionately, 'people's' history; there was, as a matter of principle, very little space in it for the *grand homme*. While sketching the importance of the medieval communes for his project, Thierry enters a larger claim concerning the collective origins of legitimate institutions:

C'est une chose bien singulière que l'obstination des historiens à n'attribuer jamais aucune spontanéité, aucune conception aux masses des hommes. Si tout un peuple émigre et se fait un nouveau domicile, c'est, aux dires des annalistes et des poètes,

[11] *PC* iv. 230.

[12] *PC* iv. 257–6. Fauriel here clearly took his cue from Thierry. As Lionel Gossman remarks, 'Thierry never wearies of debunking the "notables" of history. Charles Martel appears in his writings as a brigand. Charlemagne is presented as a barbarian chief named Karl, an adventurer whose passage through history is as violent and as transitory as that of all similar adventurers down to Bonaparte' (*Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 90).

quelque héros qui, pour illustrer son nom, s'avise de fonder un empire; si de nouvelles coutumes s'établissent, c'est quelque législateur qui les imagine et les impose; si une cité s'organise, c'est quelque prince qui lui donne l'être; et toujours le peuple et les citoyens sont de l'étoffe pour la pensée d'un seul homme. Voulez-vous savoir au juste qui a créé une institution, qui a conçu une entreprise sociale? Cherchez quels sont ceux qui en ont eu véritablement besoin; à ceux-là doit appartenir la pensée première, la volonté d'agir et tout au moins la plus grande part dans l'exécution.

It is strangely obstinate on the part of historians never to attribute any spontaneity, any conceptions to the mass of men. If a whole people emigrates and finds a new home, it is, according to the annalists and poets, because of some hero or other who, in order to render his name more illustrious, takes it upon himself to found a new empire; if new customs are established, it is some legislator or other who imagines and imposes them; if a city is created, it is some prince or other who gives it its being; and the people and the citizens are always posited as material for the thought of a single individual. Do you really want to know who has created an institution, who has conceived a social enterprise? Look for those who really needed them; it is to those that belong the inaugurating thought, the will to act, and at the very least the largest share in execution.[13]

This is effectively a *profession de foi*, and, while acknowledging that in the stress on the formative power of the 'people' we can detect the influence of the romantic 'myth of autochthony',[14] it also contains another conception of history more directly relevant to Sainte-Beuve's way with both ancient Rome and Roman Gaul. If we were to take Fumaroli's argument seriously—that Sainte-Beuve saw the history of French literature as a collectively fashioned institution—then we might expect Sainte-Beuve's historical thinking to be close in certain respects to that of Thierry. He is in fact much closer to those figures in Thierry's gallery (poet, legislator, and prince) whom Thierry opposes to both the true agent of historical process and the proper concern of the historian. The Rome favoured by Sainte-Beuve was always imperial and never republican Rome (both Montesquieu and Gibbon are charged with an excessive fondness for the 'stoic' virtues of the latter[15]). Where Gallo-Roman civilization is concerned, what Sainte-Beuve admired was the imperial *pax*

[13] Augustin Thierry, *Dix ans d'études historiques* (Paris, 1842), 353–4.

[14] Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 304.

[15] Montesquieu 'est, par inclination, favorable au Sénat, et un peu patricien de l'antique République … il a pour la nature romaine pure et antérieure à toute action chrétienne, pour la nature romaine stoique, une prédilection qu'il ne dissimulera pas' (is by inclination favourable to the Senate, and not a little patrician in his preference for the ancient Republic … he has an unconcealed predilection for pure Romanness, prior to the influence of Christianity, for the stoic essence of Rome) (*CL* vii. 65–6). Interestingly, this is the only place where the term *classique* is joined to the term *idolâtrie*: 'il entre peut-être quelque idolâtrie classique' (there intervenes perhaps a touch of classical idolatry) (vii. 66). Despite his admiration for Gibbon, he similarly chastises the latter for his neglect of the Christian aspect (*CL* viii. 457).

*romana* rather than the civic freedoms of the medieval towns (although he of course understood that the latter flowed from the former on the back of Roman law and trade). In his remarks on medieval Gothic architecture, he spoke of the 'émancipation des Communes' (the emancipation of the Communes) as 'représentant le génie du Moyen-Age en ce qu'il avait de plus libre' (representing the genius of the Middle Ages in its more freedom-loving aspect),[16] but, in the article on Raynouard, he was also quick to express doubts as to the depth and durability of burgher municipalism ('l'héritage des vieilles libertés municipales léguées par les Romains' (the legacy of the old municipal liberties bequeathed by the Romans)), alleging that Raynouard had overgeneralized from the particular as a consequence of subordinating disinterested scholarship to his enthusiasm for the principles of 1789 (one can readily imagine Sainte-Beuve saying exactly the same about Thierry; he says or implies virtually as much about Fauriel).[17]

Here then is another parting of the ways, over both the ancient city and the imperial province. The line from Rome that mattered most was not the line running from the *res publica* through the medieval *municipia* to 1789 and the invention of liberal democracy. It was rather the Rome of the *grand homme*, emperor and monarch. Sainte-Beuve would have found (and indeed, to a limited extent, did find) warrant for this in certain strands of eighteenth-century political thought that were also inspired by a Romanist view of French medieval history, but this time (well before Thierry's *tiers-étatiste* approach) of an absolutist rather than a republican nature. In these accounts it is the creation of the dynastic monarchy that is central. In his challenge to the legitimacy of absolute monarchy, Boulainvilliers had emphasized the annual assemblies of the Frankish nobles and the elective nature of kingship under the Merovingians. Boulainvilliers's attack on the monarchy in the name of feudal autonomy spawned ripostes, the best-known being the abbé du Bos's refutation, which was based on positioning the medieval kings as the heirs of imperial Rome, at once absolute in their authority and guardians of the interests of the 'people' against the depredations of the barons.

Sainte-Beuve appears to have paid very little attention to Du Bos, but he did write at length on the other eighteenth-century political thinker who was in many ways close to Du Bos, the Marquis d'Argenson.[18] In *Considérations sur le gouvernement de la France*, d'Argenson made the case for an enlightened

[16] *NL* vii.179. Renan took a similar view of medieval Gothic architecture, although he saw the Capetian monarchy as a more powerful determinant than the municipal communes (see 'L'Art du moyen âge', in *Mélanges d'histoire et de voyage* (Paris, 1878), 218–19).

[17] *CL* v. 5.

[18] On the importance of d'Argenson's political thought, see John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London, 2005), 93–8.

form of absolutism. In this he not only took issue with Boulainvilliers but also differed with Montesquieu.[19] What attracts Sainte-Beuve to d'Argenson is his prosaically moderate defence of both king and people: 'D'Argenson aimait à la fois la royauté et le peuple; il voulait le bien du peuple, sans être pour cela républicain' (D'Argenson simultaneously favoured both royalty and the people; he was for the well-being of the people without however being a republican)[20] (in more exuberant mood, recklessly throwing caution to the winds, he also described d'Argenson in the oxymoron of 'un royaliste plus socialiste que liberal' (a royalist more socialist than liberal)[21]).

In this striking account of d'Argenson, king and people are seen as natural allies, bonded in a shared resistance to the remnants of 'pouvoirs et institutions appartenant pour la plupart au régime féodal antérieur' (powers and institutions belonging for the most part to the previous feudal regime).[22] But there was also another choice here, which d'Argenson's thought was in part designed to forestall: not so much between monarch and barons, but between monarch and people (that is, precisely the choice that was to present itself post-'89). And when the 'people' slides into the dangerous territory of revolution, Sainte-Beuve's preferences are always clear. He may have made the occasional noise in support of the downtrodden Third Estate (including what is perhaps his most ridiculous statement ever—'Comme Thierry, je suis de la race des vaincus' (like Thierry, I am of the race of the vanquished)[23]—but his real allegiances lie elsewhere, with the mediating term between Thierry's conflicted race-classes: the authority of the centralized state.[24] For all the anachronistic talk of d'Argenson's 'socialist' conception of royalty, what most engages Sainte-Beuve is d'Argenson's emphasis on the firm hand and decisive action from on high (France, remarks Sainte-Beuve, with a slight edge of menace, is commendable as a polity in which it takes only twenty-four hours for a government to get its way). The position is made even clearer in the articles on

[19] The latter's admiration for the heroic moment of republican Rome did not carry over to his interpretations of Gallo-Roman civilization, probably because in his view the political reality of Gaul under the Romans was based on conquest by brute force. Montesquieu's position in the debate on the origins of France was therefore in some ways close to Boulainvilliers, at least in his hostility to the Romanist thesis and his view that the origin of modern liberty 'could be traced back to the Germanic forests' (Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, 161).

[20] *CL* xii. 151. In the same moment Sainte-Beuve also notes the disagreement with Boulainvilliers ('D'Argenson conçut l'idée de son ouvrage en opposition à celui de M. de Boulainvilliers' (D'Argenson conceived the idea of his work in opposition to that of M de Boulainvilliers)).

[21] CL xiv. 248. [22] *CL* xiv. 244.

[23] In a manuscript note attached to *Port-Royal* (quoted in Raphaël Molho, *L'Ordre et les ténèbres ou la naissance d'un mythe du XVIIe siècle chez Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1972), 313).

[24] In his later, more accommodationist writings, however, Thierry also came to emphasize the value of monarchy (see Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism*, 63).

Sully, the right-hand man of Henri IV: 'Le roi et la France! Ces deux mots sont redevenus synonymes dans la langue de Sully; le mot de patrie revient chez lui dans son vrai sens' (King and France! These two words became synonymous in the language of Sully: in his writings, the word 'fatherland' recovers its true sense).[25] If there is such a thing as a last word in Sainte-Beuve on the political meaning of 'France', this statement of the consubstantiation of king and nation is it.[26] It furnishes the requisite context for understanding his reservations over Fauriel's (and by implication Thierry's) brand of historiography. The 'people' is not an agent of change, it is a recipient of princely benevolence, and its liberties are always conditional on the sovereign's determination of the interests of state.

## II

We do not know if Sainte-Beuve read Thierry's disparaging reference, in *Dix ans d'études historiques*, to the kind of history in which the poet acts as minstrel to the hero and the prince is seen as the founder of the city. Had he done so, we can well imagine his reaction as more than matching his irritation at Fauriel's neglect of Charlemagne in his history of Gaul. For he would have both caught and bridled at what may have been intended as, amongst other things, an irreverent allusion to the *Aeneid* and the status of Virgil's epic as the great legitimating text of imperial Latinity. This was indeed the quintessence of 'poet's' history, and is ultimately where Sainte-Beuve's medievalism—such as it is—both begins and ends. What Rome transmits to Gaul, and Gaul to modern France, is the spirit of Augustan rule and the culture of the Virgilian classic. But, if the point of this somewhat prolonged detour through Sainte-Beuve in and on the Middle Ages is to send us back once more to the centrality of Virgil, it also now raises the question bracketed in the previous chapter: the relation between Sainte-Beuve's reading of Virgil and T. S. Eliot's in his 1944 lecture to the Virgil Society. Eliot's title is, of course, a direct echo of Sainte-Beuve's (though he claimed to have been unable in wartime conditions to reread it in preparing his lecture). Ordinarily, the question would be merely one of 'influences' or, more broadly, the afterlife of some of

[25] *CL* viii. 178.

[26] He was to repeat it with similar emphasis in the article on Rohan ('la ligne qui reste la plus droite, la seule française, celle du large et royal chemin' (by far the straightest line, the only French one, that of the broad royal road) (*CL* xii. 316)). The strength of this commitment did not however prevent Sainte-Beuve from also approving Pasquier's stress on the role of the Parlement and its jurists as a counterweight to abusive monarchical power (*CL* iii. 263–6).

Sainte-Beuve's ideas in the twentieth century. However, it is important in the present context because Eliot's defence of a European Latinity was a compound of ancient Rome and medieval Christendom, seen as the joint embodiments of a transhistorical and transnational civilization whose 'universal' voice is to be heard in Virgil and Dante.

There are moments when Sainte-Beuve appears to inhabit the same space. His passionate advocacy of Latinity in 'De la tradition', it will be recalled, speaks of ancient Rome as 'une œuvre de constance, d'énergie durable et d'empire politique universel' (a work of constancy, durable energy, and universal political empire), a vision of imperial reach and durability that also includes the papal city (specifically 'cette Rome aimable et raphäelesque de Léon X' (that agreeably Raphäelesque Rome of Leo X)[27]). But this is the Eternal City of the humanist Renaissance, and it is unlikely that the graciously urbane qualities of the Raphäelesque are what Eliot had in mind as the expression of a European religious imperium centred on papal authority. As we have seen, Sainte-Beuve was tempted by the 'adventist' thesis that ties the civilizing virtues of Virgil to the coming of Christ. But for Sainte-Beuve what mattered here was Christianity, as the source of a new form of moral sensibility, rather than Christendom as a coherent political and cultural ideal that so captivated Eliot (in this respect, Eliot's attachment to medieval Christendom is more reminiscent of the German romantics such as Novalis than it is of Sainte-Beuve). In fact the Rome of medieval Catholicism plays virtually no part in Sainte-Beuve's thinking about the classic, probably because he remained sympathetic to the Gallican cause, both its 'royal' and its 'episcopal' versions, and thus to a form of common religious life bounded by the 'national' and the right sanctioned by the traditional Gallican 'liberties' to resist the will of the Pope.[28]

Above all, while he shared Eliot's view of Virgil as the originary classic of the Latin world, he was never able to give the same weight of importance to Dante. In 'De la tradition' Sainte-Beuve places Virgil and Dante together (in

[27] *CL* xv. 364–5.

[28] On Sainte-Beuve and Gallicanism, see Daniel Madelénat, 'Quelques échos du romantisme européen dans le *Port-Royal*', in *Pour ou contre Sainte-Beuve: Le 'Port-Royal': Actes du colloque de Lausanne* (Geneva, 1993), 139. This was a live issue during the Second Empire, in the context of Louis-Napoleon's Italian policy and his running dispute with the Vatican. The Emperor replied to the representations of the Pope, Pius IX, by publishing la Guéronniére's book *La France, Rome et l'Italie*, a violent arraignment of Rome. Sainte-Beuve himself would never have been so intemperate. On the other hand, he goes out of his way to note the sixteenth-century origins of resistance to papal law in France and specifically to praise Pasquier: 'En face de ceux qui veulent abuser de l'autorité étrangère en France, il maintient énergiquement tout ce qui est du *vrai et naïf* Droit national' (Before those intent on the abuse of foreign authority in France he energetically upholds all that derives from *true* and *natural* national Law) (*CL* iii. 268).

the sense of maintaining that without Virgil the Dante we know would never have existed),[29] and, in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', Dante has, of course, his place in the company of the illustrious ('Dante avait paru, et de bonne heure sa postérité l'avait salué classique' (Dante had appeared, and early on those who came after saluted him as a classic)[30] ). But being saluted by one's own posterity is not the same as being saluted by Sainte-Beuve. In the *Lundis* as a whole Dante is a curiously ambivalent figure, as if he constituted some kind of test for Beuvian judgement for which the criteria are never fully secure.[31] There is an obstacle to the spontaneous appreciation of the *Divine Comedy*. In the article on Parny this is represented as a (largely unwelcome) historical alteration in the terms of taste: 'Je sais que tout a changé; nous n'en sommes plus à Horace en fait de goût, nous en sommes à Dante. Il nous faut du difficile, il nous faut du compliqué' (I know that all has changed; we are no longer of the school of Horace in matters of taste, we are of the Dante school. We require the difficult, we require the complicated).[32] The nature of the complication is clarified in the review of Deschanel's *Essai de critique naturelle*, the text in which Sainte-Beuve's concern over the displacement of the paradigm of appreciative criticism by the new historical–philological methods is most fully stated. Access to Dante's world requires a Herculean labour of scholarly interpretation. It is a necessary prerequisite to the 'conquest' of 'admiration',[33] but also prompts a longing for a yesteryear of more 'naive' or unreflective reading.

This alleged difficulty with Dante is, however, more than just a rerun of the debate over the nature of modern literary studies. It is quite genuinely a difficulty with Dante himself, and it is brought into the open in the one extended piece Sainte-Beuve wrote on the *Divine Comedy* (prompted by the publication of a new translation by Mesnard). For the most part, this article concerns itself with the history of the reception of Dante in France. It is, according to Sainte-Beuve, a chequered history: the sixteenth century prefers Petrarch, the early seventeenth century prefers Tasso, in the late seventeenth century there is an almost total eclipse (only Bayle seems to have been interested in Dante), while the eighteenth century is for the most part frankly hostile. It is only with Rivarol's translation that France first discovers something of the 'la qualité du génie de Dante', followed by Chateaubriand, Ginguené, and Fauriel.

[29] *CL* xv. 361. [30] *CL* iii. 40.

[31] In his remarks on Dante's entry into 'the pantheon of world Classicism in the nineteenth century', Curtius notes this hesitation, along with the broader context in which, for those of 'classical' persuasions, Dante's credentials as a 'classic' were problematic (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 348–50). See also Michael Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics* (Geneva, 1985).

[32] *CL* xv. 287. [33] *NL* ix. 83.

But then it is no accident that the discovery of Dante should take place at exactly the moment historical method triumphs, and it elicits the following judgement:

> Car, n'oublions jamais que Dante est moins à lire qu'à étudier sans cesse. S'il nous est donné aujourd'hui, grâce à tant de travaux dont il a été l'objet … plus il est de son siècle, moins il est du nôtre … Les beautés chez Dante sont grandes, et elles sont d'un ordre si imprévu, si puissant, et si élevé, qu'on ne regrette point, quand on les possède une fois, la peine qu'elles ont coûtée; elles ont quand même coûté une grande peine, et il est de ceux qu'on admire, en étant obligé de les conquérir à chaque pas et à chaque instant. On a sans cesse à arracher les rameaux d'or du milieu des épines qui le défendent et qui renaissent.
>
> For let us never forget that Dante is there less to be read than to be ceaselessly studied. If, thanks to all the scholarly work devoted to him, he is today available to us … the more he remains of his age, and the less he belongs to ours … There are great beauties in Dante, and they are so unexpected, so powerful, and so lofty that, once one has taken possession of them, one does not regret the effort they have cost; nevertheless, the cost has been considerable, and he is of the company of those one admires, while remaining obliged to subdue them at every step and every moment. We have ceaselessly to root out the golden boughs from the thorns that surround them and always grow back.[34]

This is another version of the argument from cultural distance that we have previously encountered in connection with the contrast of Virgil and Homer. Here, however, the critical difference rests on a temporal paradox. Virgil, further away in time, is 'close' to us in ways that Dante is not. And, if Dante is 'far', it is because the rebarbative intricacies and complexities of medieval scholastic theology are alien territory, which would then explain why both the French in general and Sainte-Beuve in particular prefer 'les productions chrétiennes appartenant à des âges plus doux' (Christian productions belonging to gentler ages).[35] The conclusion is thus inescapable, and takes us in exactly the opposite direction from the one in which Eliot wishes to go.

There is, moreover, another problem with Dante: he is not only remote but in an important sense also 'provincial'. Like Eliot, Sainte-Beuve made much of the metropolitan/provincial distinction,[36] but there would have been no full agreement between them on either the terms of the distinction or their application to the particular case of Dante. For Eliot one of the forms of the provincial was the national, which is why Shakespeare and Goethe are barred from membership of the truly universal (that is, European) classic; they remain classics only within their respective national traditions. But, whereas

[34] *CL* xi. 213. [35] *CL* xi. 213.

[36] Recall the distinction between *urbanité* and *provincialisme* (*NL* ix. 274). In his essay on academies (where Sainte-Beuve is quoted several times), Matthew Arnold speaks of 'prose without the note of provinciality—classical prose, prose of the centre', 'The Literary Influence of Academies', in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York, 1965), 285.

Virgil is naturally universal by virtue of writing in the language of empire, Dante's use of Tuscan vernacular requires (and gets) from Eliot an argument that presses so hard on some of the ideas in *De vulgari eloquentia* as to amount to special pleading: Dante's *volgare illustre* may be local in origin, but, given Dante's place in the order of medieval Christendom, it acquires a kind of origin-effacing transcendence; his Italian is an ideal language raising Dante's poetry to the level of the universal European where, in a new vernacular form, it uniquely shares with Virgil in the mission of perpetuating the *translatio imperii*.[37]

In his 'Dante' Sainte-Beuve goes some way towards this notion of a universal vernacular (Dante's language is 'une sorte de langue composite qui fut universelle pour toute l'Italie' (a sort of composite language that was universal for all Italy)[38]), but it is a universality constrained both geographically and historically (confined to Italy and a determinate period), whereas for Eliot the universality of Dante is both European and transhistorical in scope. Furthermore, in the study of Fauriel (whose own work on Dante is also discussed), even this restricted claim is substantially modified, on the grounds that Dante and Italian more generally suffered from the absence of a unified kingdom or nation; if Dante remains trapped inside a certain provincialism, this is because in Italy

> l'extrême division des États, l'absence d'un grand centre … avaient établi de profondes différences entre la langue ou plutôt les langues parlées, et la langue écrite … J'admets que l'Italie, malgré sa Toscane, ait, à quelques égards, l'inconvénient de la province, c'est-à-dire qu'on y sente le manque d'un grand centre, d'une capitale qui donne le mouvement à la langue et en règle le ton à chaque moment.
>
> the extreme division of the States, the absence of a great centre … had created profound differences between the spoken language, or rather languages, and the written language … I have to admit that Italy, notwithstanding its Tuscany, suffered in many ways from the disadvantages of the provincial, that is, one feels there the lack of a great centre, of a capital that mobilizes a language and regulates its tone at every moment.[39]

In the comparison of Sainte-Beuve and Eliot, we therefore encounter a series of disjunctions and reversals: where, for Eliot, Dante is universal, for Sainte-Beuve, he is provincial; and where in Eliot provincial equates with national, in Sainte-Beuve Dante is provincial precisely because he is insufficiently national. The latter position in fact more closely resembles Du Bellay's *Défense* than Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (and Eliot's 'What is a Classic?'). While critical of the way in which Du Bellay's nationalist commitments lead him astray on

[37] Eliot, 'Dante', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 206–7.
[38] *CL* xi. 209. [39] *PC* iv. 210–11, 226.

the origins of French, the commitments themselves appeal to Sainte-Beuve. Indeed, in the articles on Du Bellay, he sometimes speaks of French in a manner that seems to resemble Eliot's account of Dante's Italian ('Du Bellay présage, au lendemain de la mort de François Ier, le règne du français en Europe, la monarchie universelle de notre langue' (Du Bellay announces, in the aftermath of the death of François I, the reign of French in Europe, the universal monarchy of our language)[40]). But this image of French as universal language is an 'imperial' conception in a sense that is post-Dante, tied to the beginnings of the modern nation state.[41] The great difference between Dante and Du Bellay in their respective notions of the vernacular is a difference of historically induced political circumstance, which may in turn explain why we find Sainte-Beuve nudging the 'patriotic' verses of Du Bellay into the company of the *Georgics*: 'L'éloge de la France qui s'y mêle est le pendant de celui que Virgile a fait de l'Italie dans les *Géorgiques*' (The encomium to France blended into it is the pendant to that which Virgil offered to Italy in the *Georgics*).[42]

It is to the enabling power of these eminently secular conditions that Sainte-Beuve will invariably gravitate in claiming Virgil as 'our' classic. Eliot too will use the first-person plural possessive adjective, but by 'our classic' he means Virgil as 'the classic of all Europe'.[43] However, as John Coetzee has pointed out, when Sainte-Beuve describes Virgil as 'le poète de la Latinité tout entière', he does *not* mean 'all Europe'.[44] He understands, first, the Latin countries in the family of modern Romance languages, and, secondly, France as pre-eminent among them, with a privileged national relation to the Virgilian legacy. One of the noteworthy features of the *Étude sur Virgile* is the recurrence of the term 'national'. Virgil is an imperial poet but also—and indistinguishably—a national one.[45] What Eliot sought to split (the imperial versus the national), Sainte-Beuve tries to hold together as a hyphen rather than as the slash of a division. The hyphenated representation

[40] *NL* xiii. 303.

[41] See Marc Fumaroli, *Quand l'Europe parlait français* (Paris, 2001).

[42] *NL* xiii. 321.

[43] T. S. Eliot, 'What is a Classic?', in *Selected Prose*, ed. Kermode, 130. Curtius made a similar claim in altogether more flamboyant fashion: 'The awakening of Virgil by Dante is an arc of flame which leaps from one great soul to another. The tradition of the European spirit knows no such situation of such affecting loftiness, tenderness, fruitfulness. It is the meeting of the two greatest Latins' (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 358). Curtius's appeal to Latinity is to be situated in his reckoning with National Socialism and the long tradition of anti-Latin ideology in Germany.

[44] John Coetzee, 'What is a Classic?', in *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays* (New York, 2001), 2.

[45] The distinctive feature of Virgil is 'l'inspiration profonde et l'à-propos national. N'oublions jamais cela' (profound inspiration and national pertinence. Let us never forget that), and the *Aeneid* a 'grand poème national' (*Étude sur Virgile* (Paris, 1857), 71, 74). In the review 'De la Medée d'Apollonius', the *Aeneid* is seen as animated by 'un grand dessein national' (*PC* v. 363).

of the imperial–national was important because of what Sainte-Beuve wanted Virgil to mean to the French at the moment of speaking of Virgil at the Collège de France in 1855 (the same year in which the article on Dante was published)—namely, the filiation of the French nation of the Second Empire with the Roman Empire.

This was by no means an attempt to 'germanize' Rome and Virgil. Notwithstanding its occasional recourse to metaphors of 'blood' and 'descent', the argument being run in *Étude sur Virgile* was one inspired less by a romantic ethno-nationalism than by an older ideal of the nation state, based not on the autochthonous energies of the *Volk* but on reverence for the *grand homme*. For all Sainte-Beuve's dabbling in the Adventist thesis, what Virgil anticipates is not so much the coming of Christianity as the rule of Charlemagne, Henri IV, Louis XIV (above all) and of course Louis-Napoleon. We have already seen something of what this equation of Emperor of the French with his Roman ancestor was to become. In the late articles on Zeller's *Entretiens sur l'histoire* (1865) and Ampère's work (1868), the parallel was to be effusively restated in a manner whereby any vestige of responsible historical sense is washed away in a sea of disreputable analogy. Here the glory that was Rome is given a wider remit than the strictly Augustan/Virgilian period, in a homage that starts with Augustus and ends with Marcus Aurelius. Ampère's 'literary republicanism' made of him a zealot 'dans sa haine contre le régime impérial, ancien ou moderne' (in his hatred for imperial regimes, ancient or modern).[46] This, in Sainte-Beuve's view, was a blemish, less apparent in Zeller but still demanding a corrective: Augustus is 'ce profound politique' (that deep politician), Marcus Aurelius 'le plus philosophe et les plus humain de tous ceux qui ont jamais régné' (the most philosophical and the most humane of all those who have ever ruled),[47] while with 'le siècle fortuné des Antonins' (the happy age of the Antonines)[48]—this is the telling analogy—'on a véritablement "l'Empire libéral" ' (we truly have the 'liberal Empire').[49]

No one reading these words in 1865 could have failed to get the flattering allusion to the Second Empire. Whether this public swathing of the Emperor in the garb of Rome coincided with private belief is another matter. For Sainte-Beuve must have been aware that this was a cloak that slipped from the Emperor's shoulders every time it was put on, and certainly clashed violently with the rest of the political costumery Louis-Napoleon brought to his wardrobe from his various raids on the past. The eclectic medley included not only the Roman imperial but also the feudal (the very thing to which the Romanists were so ardently opposed); improbably yet imperturbably,

[46] *NL* xiii. 256. [47] *NL* ix. 335, 337. [48] *NL* xiii. 259. [49] *NL* ix. 336.

Napoleon III was to be emperor and seigneur combined.[50] The appropriation of the Caesarist pedigree was, moreover, strengthened by the Emperor's publication of his *Histoire de César*. Sainte-Beuve prudently declined an invitation to review it, but shortly before his death he wrote the beginning of a projected article, 'L'Histoire de César'. The first sentence discriminates two kinds of Caesar, the natural and the willed. Julius Caesar ('le premier et divin César' (the first and divine Caesar)[51]) is an instance of the first. We are given no examples of the second, but at the point where the manuscript breaks off, it is virtually impossible not to catch an implied reference to Louis-Napoleon: 'Mais si l'un de ces seconds Césars s'avisait, par culte, de vouloir écrire l'histoire du premier, gare à l'application naïve et crue qu'il ferait de son système! On sentirait aussitôt le *plaqué*' (But if, from hero-worship, one of these second Caesars was minded to write the history of the first, he should beware of the naive and crude application of his system! One would instantly sense the *fake*).[52]

Perhaps, therefore, the subjunctive Sainte-Beuve used elsewhere in connection with Louis-Napoleon in fact carries the weight that Molho's commentary wanted it to carry in seeking to dissociate Sainte-Beuve from an abject self-surrender to the imperial regime, although we have already accumulated fairly compelling reasons as to why we ourselves might remain sceptical of this view of a more sceptical Sainte-Beuve. In any case, whether opportunistically deployed or not, the identification of the Virgilian classic with a 'statist'

[50] This aroused the fury of republicans such as Pelletan, who included the following swipe at the Imperial regime in his review of a new edition of Thierry's anti-Frankish history: 'le siècle féodal tant admiré de l'école du césarisme, était tout uniment le monde au pillage' (the feudal age, so admired by the Caesarist school, was uniformly a world given over to pillage) (quoted in Janine Rosalind Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851–1900* (Oxford, 1973), 43). We might also note here just how politically charged the pro-Gaul, anti-Frankish position could become during the Second Empire. When in 1857 the regime decided to ban Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères du peuple*, the imperial prosecutor brought the principal charge in the form of claiming that Sue's vision of a France 'partagée de tous temps en deux races, l'une, la race franque, conquérante et oppressive; l'autre, la race gauloise, conquise et opprimée' (divided throughout the ages into two races, one the Frankish race, conquering and oppressive; the other the Gaulish race, conquered and oppressed) was superimposed on his representation of 'l'oppression de la classe de la société qu'il appelle la classe des prolétaires, les successeurs des Gaulois' (the oppression of that class of society he calls the class of proletarians, the successors to the Gauls), a representation expressly designed to incite insurrection or what the prosecutor called 'une guerre d'extermination' (a war of extermination) (quoted in Byrna Svane, *Le Monde d'Eugène Sue* (3 vols.; Copenhagen, 1986–8), iii. 70). In the build-up to the Franco-Prusssian war, however, Louis-Napoleon switched uniforms, identifying himself—via 'his' history of Julius Caesar—with Gaul calling on Rome to help save it from the barbarian German invader (see Paul Mackendrick, *Roman France* (New York, 1972), 32).

[51] *NL* xiii. 464. See also 'César, à travers ses coups de dés réitérés d'ambitieux sans scrupule et de joueur téméraire, avait donc une grande vue, une vue civilisatrice' (Caesar therefore had, running through the reiterated throws of the dice by the unscrupulously ambitious man and the bold gambler, a grand vision, a civilizing vision) (*NL* ix. 334).

[52] *NL* xiii. 465.

conception of the imperial–national remained central to Sainte-Beuve's thinking. This was light years away from Fauriel and Thierry and their reading of the *pax romana* in Gaul through the prism of the communal liberties of the proto-Third Estate. When Sainte-Beuve reproaches Fauriel for his relative lack of interest in 'des époques littéraires constituées', he means, amongst other things, an epoch constituted by its possession of a state (he refers us specifically to Louis XIV). His adhesion to the Romanist party was entirely consistent with the 'statist' model of the national classic that underlay his admiration for the seventeenth century and his hopes for a rebirth in the nineteenth century of what he called a 'state-literature'. Liberties, whether collective or individual, were of lesser importance than centralized authority.

This will be one of the principal themes of the next chapter, and, since it implicates Sainte-Beuve's generally hostile approach to Benjamin Constant as the spokesman of modern liberty, we might perhaps conclude here by contrasting Sainte-Beuve's view of literary culture in Augustan Rome with Constant's in *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec la liberté* (1817). Constant's enquiry into the fate of the writer under Augustus was motivated by the desire to test his more general hypothesis that political liberty is the precondition of a thriving literary culture and thus to counter the view that 'rien n'était plus favorable aux progrès et au perfectionnement de la littérature … que l'autorité sans bornes d'un seul' (nothing was more favourable to the progress and perfection of literature … than the limitless authority of a single person).[53] The hypothesis naturally determined the outcome of the enquiry, which, for our purposes, is reflected in an account of Virgil utterly different from Sainte-Beuve's. Constant's Virgil is not the imperial–national poet owing the perfection of his talent to having placed it in the service of enlightened despotism, but instead the alienated poet who turns 'toujours vers la liberté des regards de regret ou de désir' (always a gaze of regret or desire turned towards liberty).[54] In this connection, Constant highlights not the *Aeneid*, but the places where Virgil mourns '*les martyres de la liberté*' (*the martyrs of liberty*), Cato and Cicero.[55] In such historico-political conditions, literature is

[53] Benjamin Constant, *Œuvres* (Paris, 1957), 888. Here, it seems, Sainte-Beuve made an exception to his rejection of the progress-narrative of literary development espoused to some extent by Perrault and, more enthusiastically, by the abbé du Pons in the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.

[54] Ibid. 890.

[55] Ibid. 892. Sainte-Beuve, on the other hand, firmly dissociates Virgil from any republican nostalgias: 'il ne témoigne aucun de ces regrets sur le précédent état de la république romaine, desquels Cicéron, au contraire, est rempli' (he expresses none of those regrets for the preceeding state of the Roman republic in which Cicero, by contrast, abounds); the 'génie de Virgile' is 'par instinct ou par expérience … tout monarchique' (from instinct or experience … entirely monarchical) (*Étude sur Virgile*, 251–2).

an expression of these conditions only as a refuge from, and substitute for, the political; if autocracy encourages literature, it is merely as the neutralized space to which, having no forum for the exercise of liberty, the injured citizen retires hiding his resentments and nostalgias behind a mask of civility and sycophancy.[56] The writer in Augustan Rome is hence not the placidly serene servant of the state, providing an exquisitely crafted legitimation narrative, but rather the beleaguered occupant of an impotent dissidence.

Sainte-Beuve nowhere discusses this text by Constant, although it is a tempting thought that the *Étude sur Virgile* was in part a delayed riposte to Constant's intervention earlier in the century (Constant's text being, of course, itself a prolongation of his campaign against the 'usurper', Napoleon I). Sainte-Beuve did, however, turn on several occasions to many of Constant's other writings, most notably in an aggressively focused review of Constant's defence of modern liberty and democracy. And, while the municipalist liberties of the medieval communes elicited at least a modicum of recognition as a point of resistance to the pro-Frankish historians, when such values were transferred to the present, sympathy of this type became a rapidly dwindling asset. For there were other demons at the gate, menacing the timeless universe of the *translatio imperii*; along with the Germanic tribes (and indeed sometimes metaphorically confused with them), there were the hordes of modern democracy and another kind of 'invasion' to fear: 'l'invasion de la démocratie littéraire' (the invasion of literary democracy).

[56] Constant may have been in part inspired by the 'Whig' interpretation of Virgil in eighteenth-century England according to which 'Virgil had prostituted himself to the service of a tyrant and an autocrat' (Charles Martindale, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1997), 10).

# 8

# Literature and Democracy

## I

Sainte-Beuve, on more than one occasion, purported to be a friend of liberty and, though less frequently, claimed that the Second Empire, at least in its so-called left guise and during its so-called liberal phase, was disposed in a similarly friendly way ('ce nouvel Empire, qui, sincèrement, ne repousse pas la liberté' (this new Empire which, sincerely, does not repel liberty)[1]). Not even the adroit Senator could prevent these two propositions from ultimately colliding, famously in his various speeches to the Senate in 1867 and 1868, when the more reactionary and authoritarian face of the Second Empire political establishment displayed itself with various threats to freedom of thought and opinion.[2] These formal representations are often seen as both an act of political courage and the statement of a political creed. Clearly, it would be trivially churlish to dismiss these moments in the public career of Sainte-Beuve without further ado. On the other hand, in, for example, the speech on press freedom, there is more than a touch of feline casuistry to both the case he makes ('j'approuve la loi dans son principe, et je la contredis dans presque tous ses détails' (I approve the law in principle, and contradict it in almost all its details)[3]) and the position he finally adopts (Sainte-Beuve concludes the speech by announcing an intention to vote anyway for the law he had so eloquently denounced, on the grounds that a bad law is better than no law[4]).

[1] *NL* i. 158.

[2] For details of Sainte-Beuve's Senate speeches, see Nicole Casanova, *Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1995), 430–9.

[3] *Pr.L.* iii. 245. This seems to have been an instance of the position outlined in the article on Prévost-Paradol: 'Ayez des principes, mais qui, appliqués et dans l'usage, souffrent des modifications' (By all means have principles, but which, in their applications and uses, undergo modifications) (*NL* i. 156).

[4] *Pr.L.* iii. 279. See 'Le *goût* et la *liberté!* là est le nœud délicat. L'exemple d'Athènes est unique et ne prouve rien. Il y a quelques années déjà qu'un de mes amis fort docte, et d'ailleurs bien républicain, me donnait l'idée d'un joli Essai à faire, sous ce titre: *Que la Censure a été utile au*

More generally, the senatorial interventions on particular issues pale into insignificance alongside Sainte-Beuve's broader and repeated misgivings over the 'democratic' conception and exercise of modern liberty. Freedom of the pen mattered, especially when it concerned the professional autonomy of the journalist-critic and his protection from arbitrary or unreasonable penalty (one of the principal themes of the Senate speech[5]), but this should not be taken as indicating a strong commitment to a wider democratic dispensation for society as a whole. In the last of the three articles on Tocqueville, Sainte-Beuve refers to 'les principes de 89 qui, malgré tout, restent bien les miens' (the principles of 89 that, despite everything, remain truly mine).[6] Perhaps the most arresting phrase here is the one that comes across as entirely inert: on the face of it, 'malgré tout' is a piece of phatic discourse, a murmur in the machine designed to remind us of the disappointments and disillusionments that history inevitably brings, and that, for the mature man of the nineteenth century, must necessarily temper all ringing declarations of 'principle'; it is seasoned man-of-the-world talk. But if we were to activate the literal force of the capacious 'tout', we might find ourselves faced with a perversely self-defeating paradox. For it would have to include, as part of 'everything', everything in Sainte-Beuve's writings that makes it difficult, even impossible, to credit him with *any* profound adhesion to the principles of 1789, other than in the tendentiously edited version of 1789—a form of 1789-lite—that enabled him to countenance a view of the 'meaning' of the Revolution as an event whose teleologically driven outcome was the 1851 *coup d'état* and the regime of the Second Empire. This is the view dithyrambically affirmed in

*bon goût en littérature*. Je ne conseillerais certes à personne d'essayer de rétablir la Censure; mais il faut être juste envers ses ennemis, surtout quand ils sont morts. Il en est de la Censure comme de la rime, elle a servi beaucoup à la pensée en la gênant; elle a forcé de s'ingénier, et de trouver ce qu'en temps de pleine liberté on ne se donne pas la peine de chercher' (*Taste* and *liberty*! Here lies a delicate conundrum. The example of Athens is unique and proves nothing. Some years ago one of my very learned friends, himself moreover a republican, furnished me with the idea of a pretty Essay under the title: *That Censorship has been useful to good taste in literature*. I would certainly not advise anyone to try to re-establish Censorship; but one must be just towards one's enemies, especially when they are dead. It is with Censorship as with rhyme, it has served thought well in constraining it; it has compelled one to be ingenious and to find what at a time of complete freedom one does not bother to seek) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 58).

[5] It is also a theme in the preface to *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*: 'On a, dans ces derniers temps, inventé ou renouvelé bien des devises dont les murs se sont tapissés et dont les carrefours ont retenti: pour moi, je n'en sais qu'une que j'ai toujours ambitionné de voir inscrite au seuil, au foyer de toute existence d'homme de Lettres, et de la mienne en particulier: *liberté* et *dignité*' (In recent times, people have invented or renewed many a slogan plastered on walls and shouted at the crossroads: for myself, I know of only one that I have wanted to see inscribed at the entrance, in the home of all men of Letters, and in my own in particular: *liberty* and *dignity*) (i. 22).

[6] *NL* x. 327.

the peroration of the first instalment of 'Louis XIV et le duc de Bourgogne', proclaiming the ineluctable historical logic of the 'seul et grand parti à prendre, le parti à la Mirabeau et à la Sieyès' (the only and great side to take, the side of Mirabeau and Sieyès) as consisting in the delayed delivery of the Second Empire. The closing passage, in which Sainte-Beuve's own voice is staged as nothing less than the voice of History itself, is simply breathtaking in its intellectual audacity: 'La France, en un mot, n'a pas perdu pour attendre … Je pensais qu'au milieu de nos divisions mêmes d'opinion, il était consolant qu'on en fût venu à ce grand et magnifique résultat, aussi clair que le jour, à savoir qu'il n'y a plus en France qu'un seul ordre, une seule classe, un seul peuple' (France, in short, has lost nothing by waiting … I thought that, even in the thick of our divisions of opinion, there was something to console us in the arrival of this great and magnificent outcome, clear as daylight, namely, that there is now in France but a single order, a single class, a single people).[7]

This, too, is the position taken in the Tocqueville piece. By the 'les principes de 89' is meant, amongst other things, the central theme of Tocqueville's work: democracy. In 1832 Sainte-Beuve contemplated the prospect of democracy in France in soothingly eirenic terms: 'cette démocratie française se montrera avant tout calme, intelligente, civilisatrice, souverainement ingénieuse par ses arts et par son génie' (this French democracy will show itself as above all calm, intelligent, civilizing, supremely inventive through its arts and its genius).[8] In subsequent years, Sainte-Beuve is still 'for' democracy, that is, for a 'juste et saine démocratie' (a just and healthy democracy),[9] but where the criteria of just and true now seem to exclude the two forms of democratic polity available to the nineteenth-century political imagination: participatory democracy (the Jacobin heresy that Sainte-Beuve never ceased to denounce as the politics of the rabble) and representative democracy (contaminated by the factious passions of party, 'la désorganisation des partis'[10]). Precisely because of the historical experience of the rabble and the faction (what, more concretely, is subsumed under Sainte-Beuve's vaguely catch-all reservation 'malgré tout' in his declaration of fealty to the principles of 1789), there are moments—one such is now—when strong leadership is required, not so much to override democracy as to save it from itself. There is thus a third, flagrantly absurd form of democratic government, a democracy of 'one', the one who at present embodies the One being naturally Louis-Napoleon, standing above sectional interests, partisan loyalties, and class conflicts, able to mediate and reconcile all because he belongs to none. Thus runs the writ of the cunning of history; the mortal enemy of democracy, the *coup d'état*, now turns out to be its guardian angel:

[7] *NL* ii. 150. [8] *Pr.L.* ii. 124. [9] *PC* ii. 490–1. [10] *PC* iii. 436.

N'y a-t-il donc pas, dans la vie des nations, des moments et des heures où il est bon et utile d'être conduit? Pour le peuple en particulier, pour le très-grand nombre, n'y a-t-il pas des moments où il est salutaire et légitime que l'on soit guidé et dirigé, *et où c'est même le seul moyen que le progrès démocratique fasse un pas de plus, un pas décisif en avant* … S'il est resté quelque chose à la démocratie en France, dans nos institutions, c'est au gouvernement d'un seul qu'on le doit. Les intérêts de ce grand nombre, les questions vitales qui le touchent, l'organisation qui en doit sortir, n'ont pas de protecteur plus vigilant, plus éclairé que ce chef unique qui n'appartient à aucune classe et qui n'en a pas les méfiances.

Are there not therefore, in the life of nations, moments and times when it is good and useful to be led? For the people in particular, the overwhelming majority, are there not moments when it is salutary and legitimate that it be guided and directed, *and where it is even the only means by which democratic progress takes a further step, a decisive step forwards* … If there is anything democratic left in France, in our institutions, it is to the government of a single individual that we owe this. The interests of the majority, the vital questions that concern it, the organization that must come from this, have no more vigilant, more enlightened protector than this unique leader, who belongs to no class and does not participate in its mistrusts.[11]

I defy anyone to read this passage with a straight face (perhaps matched only by the description of Louis-Napoleon as 'un chef qui a dans la main la puissance de Louis XIV, et dans le cœur les principes démocratiques de la Révolution française' (a leader who holds in his hand the power of Louis XIV, and who has in his heart the democratic principles of the French Revolution)[12]). While, generally speaking, it is disreputably anachronistic to read Charles Maurras's enthusiasm for Sainte-Beuve back into Sainte-Beuve himself, moments such as these make the reading seem altogether plausible. They are certainly a challenge to those who stake all on Sainte-Beuve's sense of the 'real' and his will to 'truth'. The latter commitments—in truth—are invariably directed against the folly of the 'utopians' (both progressive and reactionary), but how does this tonically sceptical attitude coherently stand to a text where, in one moment, Sainte-Beuve dispatches certain utopianisms (for example, the 'orgueilleuses utopies retrospectives' (the proud retrospective

[11] *NL* x. 328–9 (emphasis added). This was not the first time Sainte-Beuve countenanced the outrageous paradox of the anti-democratic itself being a form of the democratic. In his 1827 review of Thiers's history of the French Revolution, he maliciously ties Napoleon I in the double bind of the leader who 'saves' the Constitution only by violating it ('il ne la sauva qu'en la violant, et après cette première violation, aussi nécessaire que funeste, il ne sut plus prolonger son existence qu'à force de coups d'État' (he saved it only by violating it, and, after this first violation, as necessary as it was evil, he was able to prolong its existence only by virtue of *coups d'état*) (*Pr.L.* i. 219)). Post-1848, however, he was to untie the knot in a further article on Thiers, where Napoleon is positioned simply as the saviour of France from the condition of 'savagery' (*CL* i. 139).

[12] *NL* i. 159.

utopias) of Boulainvilliers and Saint-Simon), while gathering his breath for the staging of a gimcrack utopianism of his own?

Sainte-Beuve and democracy, in short, is a dispiriting topic.[13] For every statement of allegiance, there is a barrage of caveats and qualifications, especially during the 1860s (the decade of the alleged 'liberalizing' of the Empire); and, when the chips are down and choices called for, Sainte-Beuve rarely hesitates. In his long account of the career of that prince of the press, Émile de Girardin, democracy is said to be all well and good, but it has a fatal flaw: 'lorsqu'une fois il s'est établi parmi les peuples un mauvais courant de pensées et de sentiments … il y a danger, si une main bien prudente et bien ferme n'est au gouvernail, qu'ils n'y obéissent en aveugles comme à un mauvais génie' (from the moment an evil current of thought and feeling takes root among peoples … there is the danger that, unless a very prudent and very firm hand is at the helm, they will submit to it blindly as if to an evil genius).[14] The warning against the susceptibility of the masses to manipulative demagoguery could, in another writer (Hugo, for example), be taken as a reference to Louis-Napoleon. For Sainte-Beuve it is the exact reverse: Louis-Napoleon is the firm hand on the tiller, protecting the 'people' from the consequences of an abuse of democratic freedoms. In the article on that fervent parliamentary democrat Prévost-Paradol, Sainte-Beuve poses a (rhetorical) question: 'Qu'est-ce qui vaut mieux en principe, pour un peuple, de se gouverner soi-même par des représentants directement élus … ou d'être gouverné par un seul, même le plus habile' (What in principle is better for a people, to govern themselves by directly elected representatives … or to be governed by a single individual, even the most skilful?)[15] While he avoids giving a straight answer (on the argument that programmatically theoretical positions are always maladapted to the particularities of national circumstance), it is nevertheless clear which is to count as the more attractive option for contemporary France, since the relevant list of particularities must, where France is concerned, centrally include 'son passé récent' (code for the disaster of '48) and 'ses besoins d'ordre et de réparation' (code for the legitimacy of the *coup d'état*).[16] The preference is more trenchantly stated in the article on Guéroult: liberty is a fine thing ('Liberté! ce seul nom est si

[13] Even Lepenies's spirited attempt to position Sainte-Beuve as a natural democrat ('un républicain de nature') loses it momentum: 'il acceptait avec un mélange de résignation et d'ironie l'avènement inéluctable de la démocratie' (he accepted with a mixture of resignation and irony the ineluctable arrival of democracy) (*Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 136).

[14] *NL* vii. 64. In the article on Paul-Louis Courier, Sainte-Beuve argued that what the common people need above all is a 'religion politique', defined and maintained by a strong leader (*CL* vi. 347).

[15] *NL* i. 156. [16] *NL* i. 156–7.

beau'), but in balancing 'les inconvénients et les avantages du trop d'autorité et du trop de liberté' (the disadvantages and advantages of excessive authority and excessive liberty), the scale tips in favour of the former: 'il n'est rien de tel qu'un homme, une volonté déterminante et souveraine à la tête d'une nation' (there is nothing like having a man, a determining and sovereign will at the head of a nation).[17]

It is, however, above all in his various reflections on Benjamin Constant that the anti-democratic strain in Sainte-Beuve's thought comes to the fore. Constant seems to have been something of a puzzle and an irritant for Sainte-Beuve, a brilliant thinker and writer, who nevertheless remained hollow at the core. In the *Portraits littéraires* (the first of four texts on Constant), Constant's politics are brought into discordant relation with his personality: 'même avant '89, il est démocrate, il rêve à dix-neuf ans la république américaine et je ne sais quel âge d'or de pureté et d'égalité au-delà des mers, tandis qu'en attendant il se ruine de toute façon à Paris' (even before '89 he is a democrat, at nineteen he dreams of the American republic and I know not what golden age of purity and equality across the ocean, meanwhile and in any case destroying himself in Paris).[18] This unfriendly comment is based on a more general criticism: Constant's ineliminable 'inconséquence'. According to Sainte-Beuve, Constant was the victim of an existential rootlessness that made it impossible for him to hold to firm 'principles'; beneath the spirited democratic ideals there was a void, an emptiness of the soul, in which everything turned to ashes ('un amas de poussière et de cendre' (a pile of dust and ashes)).[19] It was, of course, offered as a criticism of the man and not the beliefs, a theme he will, moreover, return to a year later in 'Un dernier mot sur Benjamin Constant'. But this turned out not to be his last word at all. The last word dealt with the beliefs themselves (the 1862 article on Constant's political writings): 'Cette doctrine libérale, au sens le plus étendu du mot, Benjamin Constant la professa' (This liberal doctrine, in the widest sense of the term, Benjamin Constant professed). Sainte-Beuve begs to differ:

> Cette doctrine est en tout l'opposé de celle de l'État. Il y a longtemps que je la connais, et dans sa formule la plus absolue … En un mot, sans faire injure à aucune entre les différentes formes d'institutions existantes, je crois à des hommes et à des génies gouvernants, et j'estime que, dans toutes les variétés de vocations et de capacités humaines, c'est celle-ci qui tient le premier rang.
>
> This doctrine is in every way opposed to that of the State. I have long been familiar with it, and with its purest formulation … In a word, and without offence to any of the existing forms of institutions, I believe in governing men and geniuses, and, amongst

[17] *NL* iv. 152, 159. [18] *PL* 883. [19] *PL* 896.

all the varieties of vocation and human capability, I value this one as being of the first rank.[20]

Here there is no vacillation, no equivocation, no fake posing of a question with the answer artfully withheld. The formula for good 'government' resides not in the pipe dreams of the democrat, but in the strength, wisdom, and prestige of the genius-ruler.[21]

## II

If democratic liberty, unrestrained by the firm hand of the state, proved something of a liability for a well-governed polity, the effects of its translation to the cultural domain could be nothing short of calamitous. In this connection, 'democracy' meant first and foremost the individualism of the market, the transformation of the public sphere into an anarchic bazaar of competing 'careers' and 'opinions',[22] and the republic of letters into a latter-day Tower of Babel.[23] The market was the site of a chasm, that 'dark' space opening up between 'art' and 'public' of which Sainte-Beuve spoke as early as 1831 in a letter to Hugo.[24] Four years later, in his article on Mme de Souza, he wrote of a 'un goût et une culture d'âme que la civilisation démocratique n'aurait pas abolis sans inconvénient pour elle-même' (a form of taste and spiritual culture that democratic civilization will have abolished at its peril) (this being, of course, what, for Sainte-Beuve, it had brazenly done).[25] These were intimations of gathering storm clouds that were finally to burst in a sequence of articles from 1839 to 1843, when it seemed that, regardless of the cultural cost, all had been thrown away. In 1840 (when he himself was just 36) Sainte-Beuve considered his century on the analogy with the life of an individual. After the moment of youthful effervescence, the century

[20] *NL* i. 412–13. On Sainte-Beuve's attitudes to Constant, see Pierre Deguise, *Benjamin Constant méconnu: Le Livre 'De la Religion'* (Geneva, 1966), 3–37.

[21] In the article on Mme du Grafigny, Sainte-Beuve quotes Turgot: 'Liberté! Je le dis en soupirant, les hommes ne sont peut-être pas dignes de toi!—Égalité! Ils te désireraient, mais ils ne peuvent t'atteindre!' (Liberty! This I say with a sigh, men are perhaps unworthy of you!—Equality! They may desire you, but will never attain you). Sainte-Beuve's gloss follows: 'Ces pages de Turgot sont excellentes, et je conseille de les lire' (These pages by Turgot are excellent, and I recommend reading them) (*CL* ii. 224).

[22] 'l'anarchie entre les hommes de talent est complète' (between men of talent anarchy reigns supreme) (*PC* iii. 427).

[23] 'cette libre et babillarde république des Lettres' (this free and garrulous Republic of Letters) (*NL* iii. 40).

[24] *Corr. gén.* i. 178.

[25] *PF* 42.

had now entered the mature phase of early middle age. It was time for a soberly reflective stocktaking.[26] The news was not encouraging. The century's middle age was a time of political and cultural inertia before the rampantly devouring power of the market: 'l'industrialisme, la cupidité, l'orgueil, ont atteint d'extravagantes limites qui ont fait un camp à part et bien large à tous les esprits modérés, revenus des aventures, amis des justes et bienfaisantes lumières' (industrialism, greed, pride have reached such extravagant limits as to create a distinct and capacious space for all moderate spirits, those that turn away from adventures to become friends to a just and benevolent enlightenment).[27]

A near helpless victim of this routing of the friends of enlightenment was literature. 'La chose littéraire', Sainte-Beuve wrote a year previously, had become the casualty of 'un vaste naufrage' (a vast shipwreck), and, while the wreckage was the outcome of 'des causes profondes', its principal origin was readily identifiable: the 'industrialization' of literary production.[28] This was to be a major Beuvian theme and supplied the title for his most searching essay in diagnostic cultural criticism, 'De la littérature industrielle'. This is the text in which he spoke of the 'invasion de la démocratie littéraire', as primarily the subjection of literature to the logic of the cash nexus: 'le *démon de la propriété littéraire* monte les têtes' (the *demon of literary property* is inflaming minds),[29] a view echoed even more emphatically in the 1843 article 'Quelques vérités en littérature': 'L'argent, l'argent, on ne saurait dire combien il est vraiment le nerf et le dieu de la littérature aujourd'hui' (Money, money, it is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which it is truly the nerve-point and the god of literature today).[30] At the centre of this entrepreneurial constellation stood the press:

> la presse, ce bruyant rendez-vous, ce poudreux boulevard de la littérature du jour … un ensemble d'abus et une organisation purement mercantile qui fomente la plaie littéraire d'alentour et qui en dépend … L'état actuel de la presse quotidienne, en ce qui concerne la littérature, est, pour trancher le mot, désastreux.
>
> The press, that noisy meeting place, that dusty boulevard of contemporay literature … a place of concerted abuses and a purely mercantile organization that foments the surrounding literary scourge and depends on it … The current state of the daily press, where literature is concerned, is, to put it bluntly, disastrous.[31]

Journalism, as the medium of the new public sphere, had perversely succeeded in destroying any sense of a 'public' other than in the abstract and fragmenting

[26] *PC* ii. 474. [27] *PC* ii. 489. [28] *PC* ii. 445.
[29] *PC* ii. 448 (emphasis in original). [30] *PC* iii. 431. [31] *PC* ii. 453, 455.

form mediated by the circulation of exchange value.[32] Of the 'quelques vérités' to be unmasked, this was the harshest:

Le public, le monde, qui dans nos idées semble depuis longtemps le juge naturel et l'arbitre des talents et des œuvres, ne remplit cette fonction que très-imparfaitement. Et d'abord, on peut se demander toujours de quel monde il s'agit. Est-ce celui de la presse, des journaux, de la publicité proprement dite? On sait ce qu'il est devenu au sein de son triomphe, depuis la désorganisation des partis. Le vrai y est sans cesse à côté et à la merci du faux; à un très petit nombre d'exceptions près, l'éloge s'y achète, l'insulte y court le trottoir, l'industrie y trône en souveraine.

The public, society, which, to our way of thinking, has for a long time appeared as the natural judge and arbiter of talents and works, discharges that function but very imperfectly. And, in the first place, we can still wonder which world it is we are talking about. Is it that of the press, newspapers, publicity properly speaking? We know what it has become at the very heart of its triumph, ever since the disintegration of the parties. Truth is ceaselessly sidelined and at the mercy of the false; with very few exceptions, praise is bought, insult roams the street, industry reigns supreme.[33]

[32] In 1851 he wrote to Siméon Pécontal: 'Les journaux, vous devez le savoir, ne sont plus, comme autrefois, des réunions d'amis s'entendant plus ou moins en commun; ce sont de grandes entreprises industrielles où les lignes se comptent' (The newspapers, you should know, are no longer, as before, gatherings of friends more or less endowed with mutual understanding; they are great industrial enterprises where lines are totted up) (*Corr. gén.* viii. 368, quoted in Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve*, 177).

[33] *PC* iii. 436. Since Sainte-Beuve was himself a working literary journalist, there was arguably an element of bad faith in this denunciation of the press. When, in 1849, Sainte-Beuve resumed his journalistic career with the *Constitutionnel*, the satirical journal *Le Charivari* sought to catch him *in flagrante delicto* of self-contradiction. After a decade of attacking the effects of literary democratization (the press, journalism, the *feuilleton*), Sainte-Beuve was proposing to 'democratize' himself: 'Voilà une joyeuse, une heureuse, une charmante nouvelle! M. Sainte-Beuve est de retour, M. de Sainte-Beuve cesse de bouder la République; bien plus, il consent à se faire peuple, à écrire des articles comme vous et moi, que dis-je, des articles! Des feuilletons, et dans quel journal? Dans le *Constitutionnel*! … Il n'y a pas à s'y méprendre: M. Sainte-Beuve est devenu feuilletoniste, il s'est popularisé, démocratisé si vous aimez mieux, au point de monter sur le tréteau commun' (Here we have a joyous, happy, charming piece of news! M. de Sainte-Beuve is back, M. de Sainte-Beuve has stopped sulking over the Republic; even better, he has consented to becoming popular, to writing articles like you and me, my goodness, articles! Features, and in which newspaper? In the *Constitutionnel*! … Make no mistake about it: M. Sainte-Beuve has become a features writer, he has popularized, or, if you prefer, democratized himself, to the point of mounting the public platform). But this was no mere spoof; in turning the tables on Sainte-Beuve, *Le Charivari* was under no illusions as to the paradoxically anti-democratic political character of this alleged self-democratization: '*Le Constitutionnel* aura donc les grands jours de M. Sainte-Beuve. Quand commencera-t-il? On l'ignore. Mais le premier article est attendu avec la plus vive impatience par les défenseurs de l'ordre et de la société' (The *Constitutionnel* will thus have its big Sainte-Beuve days. When will he start? We do not know. But his first article is awaited with the liveliest impatience by the defenders of order and society) (quoted in Roger Fayolle, *Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle, ou Comment les révolutions arrivent* (Paris, 1972), 388).

The newspaper was the locus of a causal circle: at once a commodity for everyday consumption, a medium for the buying and selling of other commodities (advertising), and an instrument of commodification (the transformation of literature into pure *marchandise*). Girardin (unnamed but unmistakeably alluded to in 'De la littérature industrielle') had reduced the annual subscription price to 40 francs ('La presse dite à quarante francs'[34]). Increased sales would recoup some but not all the losses. One solution was to augment revenues from the more extensive inclusion of advertising, the advertisers themselves encouraged by the prospect of higher circulation figures. Sainte-Beuve devotes several pages to a brilliant sociological analysis of the *annonce* as the causal crux of this scene of devastation: its effects included the venality of the 'bought' review and the exploitation by publishers of the lowest common denominator of public taste (as a consequence of the financial burden of advertising books). Finally—completing the causal circle—there was that added stimulus to newspaper sales (vital to attracting the advertisers), the form of 'industrial literature' par excellence, the *roman-feuilleton*.

As a journalistic supplement, serial fiction was in Sainte-Beuve's eyes a betrayal of both literature and the public it was supposed to serve. In respect of the latter, it took the lowest common denominator to new depths:

> La fatuité combinée à la cupidité, à l'industrialisme, au besoin d'exploiter fructueusement les mauvais penchants du public, a produit, dans les œuvres d'imagination et dans le roman, un raffinement d'immoralité et de dépravation qui devient un fait de plus en plus quotidien et caractéristique, une plaie ignoble et livide qui chaque matin s'étend.
>
> Fatuity combined with greed, with industrialism, with the need to profit from exploiting the bad propensities of the public, has produced, in works of the imagination and in the novel, a refinement of immorality and depravity that becomes a characteristic feature of everyday life, a livid, ignoble sore that spreads daily.[35]

('chaque matin' being presumably in part a reference to the daily instalment of the *feuilleton*). In respect of the former, it shamelessly subordinated the arts of writing to the pecuniary interests of the marketplace. One modality of this economic subordination was the ruthless exploitation of a literary equivalent of the economical: namely, the succinct. For so long as the serial novelists were paid by the line, it made sense for them to cast their product as far as possible in dialogue form, preferably as terse and taciturn as possible (the day the newspaper proprietors revised their policy, Dumas *père* killed off one of his characters whose only defining feature was to utter 'oui' or

[34] *PC* ii. 457. [35] *PC* iii. 428.

'non'—as, of course, separately spaced lines—in all conceivable narrative situations). The converse modality ran in the direction of the prolix, not just as the prolongation of the story via all manner of digressions and subplots, but also as padding with superfluous description ('l'on redouble de vains mots, de descriptions oiseuses, d'épithètes redondantes; le style s'est *étiré* dans tous ses fils comme les étoffes trop tendus' (increase of pointless words, idle descriptions, redundant adjectives; style, in all its threads, has been stretched out like material drawn too tight)).[36] Intrinsic function no longer counted; the name of the game was word-spinning as money-spinner.

The key figure in the spectacular success of the serial novel was Eugène Sue. In 1840 Sainte-Beuve wrote a mildly complimentary review of Sue (at this time still the dandyesque author of elegant salon potboilers). Sue's work reflected 'la *moyenne* du roman' (the middlebrow novel).[37] It is, of course, faint praise, but the tone remains polite, largely because Sue himself is seen as polite, a bit of a roguish entertainer, to be sure, but altogether a 'good fellow', performing with exemplary literary manners, a gentlemanly decorum unlikely to cause offence. While there is nothing remarkable to his output, there is nothing in it to upset us, for so long as he continues to write 'avec une certaine convenance' (with a certain decorum).[38] Moreover the notion of the 'average' or the 'mean' fitted perfectly the *juste-milieu* version of democracy under the July Monarchy. In this respect, with certain adjustments, Sue could have been easily assimilated to that dimension of the 'enlarged' definition of the 'classic' where the criterion for inclusion was a work's 'representative' value (rather than its enduring greatness), the extent to which it was typical of a genre, a style, or a period; as the 'moyenne du roman', it could reasonably be seen as a characteristic expression of what D. H. Lawrence was to call the 'emotional–democratic' period.[39] In short, Sue's work could have qualified as an example of the 'minor' classic, thus reinforcing and extending the democratizing tendency in Sainte-Beuve's conception of the collective nature of national literary life, in which the 'minor' classic had a modest yet important place.

This, however, was a theme that Sainte-Beuve did not pursue, and we can see why when we consider the note he appended to a subsequent reprint of his article. The note was added to take into account the turning point in Sue's career reflected by the serial publication from 1842 to 1843 in the *Journal des débats* of *Les Mystères de Paris*, the novel in which Sue quit the salon and the *beau monde* for the Parisian underworld, the *bas-fonds* of urban crime and poverty. Here all semblance of politeness goes, so to

[36] *PC* ii. 459–60. [37] *CP* 81. [38] *CP* 89.

[39] D. H. Lawrence, Preface to Giovanni Verga, *Masto-don Gesualdo*, in *Phoenix*, ed. Edward D. MacDonald (London, 1961), 226.

speak, down the drain. As Sue the writer removes his famed yellow gloves to plunge his hand into the mire, Sainte-Beuve takes off his own as critic. The new Sue is a charlatan, the perfect market-operator. The primary objection is to Sue's gross sensationalism and its blatantly commercial inspiration. But, since in the earlier (allegedly more 'polite' novels) there was a similar capitulation to the market (which on the whole Sainte-Beuve did not find objectionable), there has to be something else motivating Sainte-Beuve's animosity. It is directed not merely to the quality of the writing, but also to its subject matter. With *Les Mystères de Paris*, literature has stepped into the gutter, but it is no longer just the gutter of the 'boulevard' (the 'poudreux boulevard' that is Sainte-Beuve's metonymic trope for the world of commercial journalism[40]) but that of the 'street'. If the boulevard is the site of a money-based individualism (the powerful 'dissolvent' of culture), the street is associated with the lower depths, the site of criminality and insurrection; and, in a characteristic metaphor switch, the *bas-fonds* is also a sewer, the origin of a 'tide' of filth spewing into literary culture. It is 'industrialism' at its most polluting, and 'democracy' at its unbearable worst: 'Toutes les écluses ont été lâchées, et les ruisseaux aussi. La haute mer a fait invasion, et les bas-fonds ont monté' (All the sluices have been released, along with the streams. The high tide has swept in, and the shallows have risen).[41]

Faced with these developments, Sainte-Beuve felt obliged to issue a call to retrenchment, in the course of which the idea of a 'literary democracy' was to undergo a substantial modification. In 'Dix ans après en littérature', he envisages the formulation of an embattled 'politique de conservation' (a policy of conservation) to save 'la chose publique' (the public sphere) from the 'morcellement misérable' (wretched fragmentation) inflicted by the ravages of the market.[42] This appears to be the first time Sainte-Beuve uses the term 'conservation' to describe a more general cultural and critical enterprise. In 'Quelques vérités sur la situation en littérature', it is to take the form of an

[40] *PC* ii. 453.

[41] *CP* 88. The same imagery of 'mud' and 'dregs' is to be found in both 'De la littérature industrielle' ('De nos jours le bas-fond remonte sans cesse et devient vite le niveau commun' (Today the depths ceaselessly rise up and quickly establish the common level) (*PC* ii. 470)) and 'Quelques vérités sur la situation en littérature' ('la boue des rues et l'ordure des bornes remontaient jusqu'au balcon' (the mud of the streets and the filth of the milestones rose as far as the balconies) (*PC* iii. 421)). The precise social reference of this cluster of images (the ultimate betrayal of writing for rough-hewn 'proletarians' rather than for middle-class sensitive souls) is made clear in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*: 'tel romancier de même, au lieu de s'adresser aux cœurs délicats et blessés, aux imaginations nobles et sensibles, n'a plus visé qu'aux prolétaires' (by the same token, such a novelist, instead of addressing himself to delicate and wounded hearts, to noble and sensitive imaginations, has targeted only the proletarians) (i. 77).

[42] *PC* ii. 488.

'elite' rallying of forces behind an organ of expression, the Review (specifically, he has the *Revue des deux mondes* in mind):

> Combien de fois n'avons-nous pas rêvé par l'association libre une institution qui, jusqu'à un certain point, y suppléerait! Un journal, une *revue* dont l'établissement porterait sur des principes, et dont le cadre comprendrait une élite honnête, est un idéal auquel dès l'origine il a été bien de viser.
>
> How often have we not dreamed of an institution based on free association, which, up to a certain point, would compensate! A journal, a *review*, whose establishing would bear on principles and whose personnel would include an honest elite, is an ideal which at the outset has been worth aiming for.[43]

The Review, it will be seen, is not just an outlet of opinion; it is also conceived as an 'institution'. This recalls yet again the emphasis on the role of institutions in the organization of the national culture, and which, in connection with literary endeavours, seemed to entail a limited notion of 'democratic' inclusiveness (the 'minor' as well as the major, as a small but useful brick in the edifice of culture). But here the notion has undergone a further restriction, strictly internal to a guild-like community of critics and intellectuals. This is the site on which 'des mœurs littéraires d'une saine et juste démocratie' (the literary manners of a just and healthy democracy) will be redefined: 'Mais la première condition de toute communauté littéraire, c'est l'égalité morale, toute part faite à la supériorité des talents' (But the first condition of any literary community is moral equality, while making allowance for superior talent).[44] This is quite different from that bygone age, nostalgically evoked in 'Quelques vérités', of the honest man of letters doing his little bit within a hierarchy of literary ranks, functions, and competences ('Oh qu'on me rende la race de ces honnêtes gens de talent qui faisaient tout bonnement de leur mieux, avec naturel, travail et sincérité' (Oh if one could bring back that race of honest talents who simply did their best, naturally, diligently, and sincerely)).[45] What remains of literary democracy in the age of political democracy is a shrivelled version of an earlier epoch, less a property of the national culture as a whole than a specialized sector within it: the corporate body of professional writers.[46]

[43] *PC* iii. 437–8 (emphasis in original). [44] *PC* ii. 481. [45] *PC* iii. 428.

[46] One of Sainte-Beuve's hopes was to create an equivalent in the nineteenth-century bourgeois–democratic sphere of the seventeenth-century 'corps littéraire d'État' initiated by Richelieu's founding of the Académie and consolidated under Louis XIV. But the recreation of the latter in the conditions of the former was a lost cause, a point equally lost on Fumaroli; his determination to see the administratively centralized literary institution of the seventeenth century as stamping the whole of corporate literary life in France ever since leads him to posit an entirely a-historical continuum running from the Académie française to—of all things—Sartre's

To the members of this body Sainte-Beuve was to give a name, the 'ouvrier littéraire': 'La littérature en France est aussi une démocratie, elle l'est devenue. La très-grande majorité des gens de lettres sont des travailleurs, des ouvriers d'une certaine condition, vivant de leur plume' (Literature in France is also a democracy, it has become one. The vast majority of men of letters are workers, labourers of a given type, living from their pens). This is from a text written in 1856 with the title 'L'ouvrier littéraire', as a note addressed to the government 'au sujet des encouragements à donner aux gens de lettres' (on the subject of encouragements for professional writers).[47] The term 'ouvrier littéraire' was clearly important to Sainte-Beuve, since it was to recur in a variety of contexts, but it is easily misunderstood. It needs to be distinguished from two other categories. The first is the older type of the 'honnêtes gens de lettres' of a now vanished culture (the meaning of 'ouvrier', for example, in Sainte-Beuve's description of Bussy-Rabutin as an 'ouvrier de notre langue'[48]). The second is the 'worker' in the modern sense of the proletariat. Wolf Lepenies has argued that there is in fact a certain identification of the two, mainly on the back of Sainte-Beuve's review of Le Play's descriptive enquiry into the conditions of the modern working classes.[49] It is true that in this article Sainte-Beuve proposes an addition to Le Play's taxonomy:

> Parmi tous ces types d'ouvriers que M. Le Play ou ses collaborateurs ont si bien décrits … il en est un qu'ils ont négligé et que je signale à leur attention; celui-là je l'ai observé de près depuis bien des années, et j'ai vécu avec lui, je pourrais dire comme lui; aussi suis-je en état de le décrire, et je l'essayerai même, puisque l'idée m'en est venue: c'est *l'ouvrier littéraire*.
>
> Among all the types of worker that M. Le Play or his collaborators have so well described … there is one they have neglected and which I draw to their attention; this type I have observed closely for many years, and have lived with it, or, I might say, as it; I am therefore well placed to describe it and will indeed try to do so, since the idea originates with me: it is *the literary worker*.[50]

But, for all this alleged proximity of condition (most notably a common exposure to the vicissitudes of the market), there remained, for Sainte-Beuve himself, an unbridgeable gulf between the literary worker and the worker in the normal sense of the term—namely, the gulf between manual and mental labour.[51] Sainte-Beuve's 'ouvrier littéraire' belonged on one side of

*Les Temps modernes* ('La Coupole', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de memoire*, pt. 2, *La Nation* (Paris, 1986), 330).

[47] *Pr.L.* iii. 61. [48] *CL* iii. 51.

[49] Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve*, 181–5. [50] *NL* ix. 173–4 (emphasis in original).

[51] Lepenies interprets Sainte-Beuve's 'ouvriers littéraires' as 'des manuels vivants de leur plume' (manual workers living by their pen) (*Sainte-Beuve*, 185), when in fact his classical

this division, as a strictly professional category, and it never occurred to him that the boundary line separating the two spheres might be crossed or blurred. Indeed, in his recommendations regarding the semi-professional Société des gens de lettres ('cette démocratie littéraire'[52]), he is quite explicit in his insistence that the writers' guild has nothing in common with a workers' association, in either the older form of the *compagnonnage* or the more recent labour associations from which were to emerge the modern trade unions: 'il ne faudrait pas tomber ici dans rien qui rappelât les coalitions d'ouvriers; on a bien crié contre la *camaraderie*, ceci est déjà du *compagnonnage*' (one must not, however, fall prey here to anything that recalls worker coalitions; one has already vociferated against *comradeship*, but this already smacks of the *labour corporations*).[53]

In short, the notion of the writer-worker was not to be confused with the case of the worker-writer; if anything, the former was expressly designed to keep the latter out or alternatively to grant him or her a fractional space on condition that it was properly policed. Nowhere was this more visible than in Sainte-Beuve's remarks on that relatively new literary development, the worker-poet. Why might the franchise not extend rights of recognition to the worker-poet? How could his exclusion from the democratic fraternity be seen as anything other than wilfully arbitrary? One obviously rational objection stemmed from a refusal to allow a sentimental populism to usurp standards of critical judgement. Sainte-Beuve had witnessed at first hand the condescending bad faith of Lamartine and Hugo lavishing praise on efforts most of which they knew could only be stumbling and bungled imitations of conventional verse (though there was also the reverse condescension of Eugène Lerminier—whose intervention we come to shortly—for whom, in his determination to keep the worker away from the scene of writing altogether, it was child's play to point out just how botched they so often were). But if, in the name of the collective literary endeavours of the 'nation', the category of the 'minor classic' could comfortably house the workmanlike but undistinguished memoirs of a minor diplomat, why could it not a fortiori make room for some of the more accomplished poems of, say, Pierre Dupont, of whom Baudelaire wrote that his signal honour consisted in just this raising—or rather this razing—of the drawbridge barring entry into the fortress of literature: 'Ce sera l'éternel honneur de Pierre Dupont d'avoir le premier enfoncé la porte. La hache à la main, il a coupé les chaînes

dispositions made him an heir to the traditional hierarchy distinguishing mental and manual labour. His late admiration for Gautier, for example, was tempered by his coolness towards Gautier's identification of poetry with artisanal 'craft' (see René Wellek, 'Sainte-Beuve', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven, 1965), 62).

[52] *PC* ii. 468. [53] *PC* ii. 463–4 (emphasis in original).

du pont-levis de la forteresse; maintenant la poésie populaire peut passer' (It is eternally to the honour of Pierre Dupont to have been the first to break down the door. Axe in hand, he has cut the chains of the fortress's drawbridge; popular poetry is now free to pass) (that is 'pass' across the frontiers of the system of the division of manual and mental labour).[54] If Sainte-Beuve proved unable to contemplate a crossing of this kind, it was not solely for literary–critical reasons, but also for political ones. Any extension of the democratic franchise to the lower orders not only opened the floodgates to the deluging of culture by the demands of the market; it also risked the entry of the 'street' into literature, in the sense of a return of the spectre of revolution (in fact not that spectral for someone so close to the events of 1848). Accordingly, before turning to Sainte-Beuve's remarks on popular poetry, we need to look again, and in more detail, at his view of revolution.

## III

Revolution was rarely far from Sainte-Beuve's thoughts and lay at the heart of an ongoing reflection on literature, history, and society. But there were in particular two phases in which the topic of revolution—specifically the great Revolution—was especially prominent in Sainte-Beuve's critical writings. The first was the cluster of articles produced in the late years of the Restoration, principally devoted to reviewing the early nineteenth-century historiography of the French Revolution (the books by Thiers, Mignet, and Laurent) and culminating in the free-standing essay 'Deux révolutions', written within a month of *les trois glorieuses* both to mark and to welcome the July Monarchy. The second—focusing less on the historiography than on some of the revolutionary actors themselves (Barnave, Desmoulins, Mirabeau, Sieyès, Saint-Just[55])—was the flurry of *Causeries*

[54] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1961), 613.

[55] The definitive study of this cluster of articles and their more general relation to Sainte-Beuve's (thoroughly politicized) conception of his role as critic after 1848 remains Fayolle's *Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle ou Comment les révolutions arrivent*. Anyone in any doubt as to the overtly political tendency of these pieces need turn only to Fayolle's patient reconstruction of Sainte-Beuve's use of sources for his interpretation of Barnave. Barnave is identified with moderation and a 'noble' refusal of the Terror (*CL* ii. 37–8). Yet to position Barnave in this way, Sainte-Beuve has to truncate Barnave's text. The extract Sainte-Beuve reproduces from Barnave's memoirs breaks off immediately before the following: 'Je dis que je m'affligeais de ces événements, mais que je ne pensais pas qu'il fallût, pour cela, renoncer à la révolution; que toutes les révolutions entraînaient des malheurs et qu'il fallait peut-être se féliciter que celle-ci

composed on his return from Liège to take up his position with *Le Constitutionnel*—that is, at roughly the same time he writes 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' (which, it will be recalled, itself begins by specifying the 'delicacy' of its question in terms of society's vulnerability to the damaging force of revolution).

While there is a certain continuity linking these two groups of articles, there are also some noticeable differences. In his reviews of the histories by Thiers and Mignet, Sainte-Beuve is largely focused on the presuppositions of a new form of history—writing strongly invested in the causal analysis of the past as a law-bound process, a secular equivalent—as Sainte-Beuve points out in his discussion of Mignet[56]—of the divine providentialism of Bossuet's universal history. On this model of historical understanding, the unfolding of the Revolution is seen, beyond all its individual peripeteia and unspeakable horrors, as the embodiment of an unstoppable collective mass bearing within it the ineluctable arrival of modernity. While acknowledging the intellectual force of this determinist—Sainte-Beuve calls it 'fatalist'—account, he nevertheless raises two objections. One concerns the place in history of happenstance, the random, and the accidental, along with the might-have-beens of counterfactual thinking.[57] The second concerns the extent to which this type of understanding removes us from the sphere of judgement, especially

n'eût à se reprocher qu'un petit nombre de victimes' (I said that I was distressed by these events, but I did not think that, because of that, one had to renounce the revolution; that all revolutions involve misfortunes and that it was perhaps cause for congratulation that this one had but a small number of victims with which to reproach itself) (quoted in Fayolle, *Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle*, p. 175). It is inconceivable that Sainte-Beuve could have missed this passage in his reading of Barnave. It has been deliberately left out, for the reason that its inclusion would have not merely compromised but seriously wrecked Sainte-Beuve's opposition of the 'good' revolutionary and the 'bad' one. This from a critic whose primary obligation is respect for the integrity of the text he discusses.

[56] *Pr.L.* i. 108.

[57] *Pr.L.* i. 107. In the article on Guizot, Sainte-Beuve returns to this question at greater length: 'Je suis de ceux qui doutent qu'il soit donné à l'homme d'embrasser avec cette ampleur, avec cette certitude, les causes et les sources de sa propre histoire dans le passé: il a tant a faire pour la comprendre bien imparfaitement dans le présent et pour ne pas s'y tromper à toute heure' (I am of the party that doubts that it is given to man to grasp so fully and so certainly the causes and sources of his past history: there is so much to do in order to understand it but imperfectly in the present and not constantly fall prey to self-deception). Against the necessitarian philosophy of history, Sainte-Beuve prefers a more pragmatically oriented sense of counterfactual possibility: 'en politique, il y a plusieurs manières différentes dont une chose qui est en train de se faire peut tourner' (in politics there are several different ways in which something that is taking place can turn out) (*CL* i. 316, 319). See also the remark in the article on Montesquieu praising Machiavelli for 'nous rappelant toujours, au milieu de ses réflexions mêmes, combien il entre de hasard, c'est-à-dire de causes à nous inconnues dans l'origine et dans l'accomplissement de ces choses de l'histoire' (recalling for us, in the midst of these very reflections, the scale of chance, that is, causes that in their origin and in their historical outcomes are unknown to us) (*CL* vii. 70).

judgements of 'indignation' before the abominations committed in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity.[58] Sainte-Beuve himself is in no way deterred, sprinkling his text with judgements galore, although they are subordinated to a respectful engagement with the works under review and, more important, are nuanced in a way that will be rarely the case in the writings after 1848. Thus, alongside the conventional distinction he shares with Thiers between a 'good' Revolution (that of the moderate, constitutional Girondins[59]) and a 'bad' Revolution (the excesses of the Jacobins and the bloodbath of the Terror), Sainte-Beuve also fine-tunes the monolithically negative view of the Montagne with a number of important discriminations. There were, for instance, two kinds of 'anarchy', the wantonly destructive but also the 'vive, confiante, aventureuse' (lively, confident, adventurous) form of anarchy, animated by a non-criminal 'exaltation républicaine' (republican elation), and even the *sans-culottes* were more than simply 'le travestissement d'une faction ennemie de la liberté' (the travesty of a faction hostile to liberty); beneath the 'frénésie' lay buried a worthy cause.[60] Perhaps most surprising of all are the comments on Robespierre in the review of Laurent's *Réfutation de l'histoire de France de l'abbé Montgaillard*. Even as he registers his disagreement with Laurent's—highly unfashionable—defence of the Terror (on the argument that not only were the motives of its perpetrators civically disinterested but that the Terror itself was necessary to save the Revolution from collapse), Sainte-Beuve remains sedulously even-handed. On Robespierre himself, situated hyperbolically as 'l'homme monstrueux qui a mis son sceau sur la plus épouvantable épisode de *l'histoire du monde*' (the monster who placed his seal on the most dreadful episode in *the history of the world*),[61] he is nevertheless prepared to keep an open mind, albeit serving notice that it was unlikely to stay open for long.

Most of these qualifications and subtleties were to vanish in the aftermath of 1848, in the *Causeries* of the early 1850s and the *Nouveaux lundis* of the 1860s. The Girondin/Jacobin divide is replayed (as 'l'âge d'or de la révolution

[58] *Pr.L.* i. 84–5.

[59] 'Plus que jamais … l'immortelle Gironde est la limite à laquelle notre pensée se plaît et s'obstine à s'arrêter' (More than ever … the immortal Gironde is the limit-point at which our thought both desires to stop and insists on so doing) (*PF* 167). The historical realist in Sainte-Beuve is never once allowed to override the ideological, and sentimental, attachment to the Gironde. It thus never occurs to him to ask why the Girondins *lost*. They did so not just because the Jacobins proved more ruthless, but from the contradictory nature of a position simultaneously requiring full-blooded war abroad (the Girondins were impressively bellicose) and political moderation at home. They failed to understand that the former commitment demanded a dictatorship in charge of a 'total war effort' (see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London, 1977), 88).

[60] *Pr.L.* i. 197–8, 202.

[61] *Pr.L.* i. 284–5 (emphasis added).

de 89 avant les crimes, avant les excès et tant la concorde s'annonce comme possible' (the golden age of the 89 revolution before the crimes, the excesses, when concord announces itself as a possibility)[62]), but this time minus the extenuating considerations applied to the latter. Gone is the distinction between two kinds of political 'anarchy', dissolved into a generalized image of regression to savagery and barbarism ('ce retour inouï de la barbarie en pleine civilisation' (the incredible return of barbarism in the midst of civilization)).[63] The Jacobins and the *sans-culottes* are now the barbarians at the gate, a latter-day equivalent of the marauding Goths.[64] The rights of 'judgement' over and above the endeavour of historical understanding take hold entirely in connection with the figure of Saint-Just, who is arraigned as a monster straight out of a peculiarly nightmarish Gothic novel. Indeed, in a gesture of censorship that would have been inconceivable in Sainte-Beuve's earlier years (and moreover made just one month after he spoke up for 'liberty' in the Senate), he saluted the publication of Malouet's *Mémoires* with a long list of the principal figures of the Revolution, which nevertheless did not include the names of Robespierre, Saint-Just, or Danton; they are simply evacuated from the scene of history under the extraordinary claim 'Je crois que je n'ai rien omis, que tous les moments essentiels de la Révolution sont représentés' (I believe I have omitted nothing, that all the essential moments of the Revolution are represented).[65]

But perhaps the most interesting of these later interventions—because concerned with the only questions that really mattered to Sainte-Beuve, questions of writing—was the article on the pamphlets and journalism of Camille Desmoulins.[66] This was a second visit. The first time round—in 1825—the focus is on Desmoulins's *Le Vieux Cordelier*, the testament of the penitent Jacobin preaching the virtues of clemency and compassion rather than the ruthless application of the abstract principles of revolutionary Justice.[67] In the later account (1850), the Desmoulins of the *Le Vieux Cordelier* is still there, but is pushed into the background by a detailed engagement with the texts of Desmoulins's high Jacobin period. The article, moreover, has a context; it is

[62] *CL* x. 366. In the article on Droz's *Histoire du règne de Louis XVI*, he is drawn to Droz's counterfactual fantasy that the Revolution might never have happened or at least have been aborted before it became truly revolutionary: 'Il y aurait eu moyen, si un homme éclairé et ferme s'était trouvé investi à temps du pouvoir, de régler la Révolution française, de l'empêcher de dégénérer en violence aveugle et en anarchie, et la faire arriver au port avant d'avoir traversé et épuisé toutes les tempêtes' (If a firm and enlightened man had assumed power in time, there would have been a way of regulating the French Revolution, of preventing it from degenerating into blind violence and anarchy, and of bringing it safely to port before having passed through and exhausted all the storms) (*CL* iii. 181).

[63] *NL* ii. 78. [64] *CL* iv. 496. [65] *NL* xi. 277.

[66] Fayolle highlights its importance (*Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle*, 185).

[67] *Pr.L.* i. 65–71.

the third of a sequence following immediately on the heels of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', devoted to a qualititative assessment of the state of the language in three different periods: the language of 'urbanity' in the age of Louis XIV, the transformation of literary prose effected by Rousseau in the eighteenth century, and finally 'la langue révolutionnaire' as illustrated by the political writings of Desmoulins. Its third chapter is broadly the story of a fall from literary grace, the corruption of language by the violent political passions of the 'boute-feu' (the rabble rouser): *fou*, *atroce*, *délire*, *cynisme*, *grossièrté*, *odieux*, *infâme* are just some of the terms of a relentless indictment.[68] Desmoulins's Jacobin discourse is no longer the language of 'republican exaltation' but the language of a mind deranged ('moins un cœur réellement échauffé qu'une cervelle en ébullition' (less a truly excited heart than a seething brain)[69]), at once a reflection and a reinforcement of a collective derangement, an 'image vivante (jusque dans les meilleurs endroits) du dérèglement des mœurs et des âmes' (living image (even in its best parts) of a derangement of manners and of the spirit).[70] It is also a pollution as well as an incitement; after reading it, we reach desperately for an antidote that will cleanse both the spirit and the culture (Vauvenargues is cited as an instance of the desired therapy, and will indeed be the subject of the succeeding article; the same pharmological function will be attributed two years later to the maxims of Portalis as a corrective to the 'poisonous' aphorisms of Saint-Just, 'concentrés et mortels comme le poison' (concentrated and deadly like poison)[71]):

> Oh! Comme, après la lecture de ces pages bigarrées, toutes tachées encore de boue et de sang … comme on sent le besoin de revenir à quelque lecture judicieuse où le bon sens domine, et où le bon langage ne soit que l'expression d'un fonds honnête, délicat, et d'une habitude vertueuse! On se prend à s'écrier en se jetant en arrière … O les écrivains polis, modérés et purs! O le Nicole des *Essais*! O Daguesseau écrivant la Vie de son père! O Vauvenargues! O Pellisson!
>
> Oh! How greatly, after reading these motley pages, all stained with mud and blood … how greatly one feels the need to come back to the reading of something judicious, where common sense dominates, and in which right language is but the expression of honest, delicate substance and virtuous habit! One finds oneself crying out, with head thrown back … O for the writers who are polite, moderate, and pure! O for the Nicole of the *Essays*! O for Daguesseau writing the Life of his father! O for Vauvenargues! O for Pellisson![72]

Whatever this version of mental hygiene amounts to, it clearly has little to do with the enterprise of understanding the past. There is more than a touch

[68] *CL* iii. 103, 104, 108, 111. [69] *CL* iii. 109. [70] *CL* iii. 121.

[71] *CL* v. 453. There is surely an unintended irony here, since it was Portalis who devoted himself to 'concocting' a narrative with which to legitimate the Napoleonic usurpation.

[72] *CL* iii. 121.

of the hysterical in the spectacle of a lexicon in overdrive, in some respects ironically a mirror image of the very lack of proper measure for which he reproaches Desmoulins. In the articles on the Revolution of the earlier phase, Sainte-Beuve's judgements were often emphatic, but there is nothing there that resembles the abusive fury of these later pieces.[73] For, in the meantime, there had, of course, been the devastating experience of the insurrections of 1848. We have already seen something of what this meant for Sainte-Beuve, and will return to it again in the next chapter. For now we need to register the extent to which for Sainte-Beuve the invasion of literary democracy became attached to the fear of revolution. Matthew Arnold claimed that the French Revolution began by generating a serious intellectual culture ('a spiritual event' based on 'an order of ideas which are universal, certain, permanent'), but which it then abandoned because, being committed to 'action', it ran out of time for 'thought'.[74] We find echoes of this view in early Sainte-Beuve,[75] but, in the aftermath of 1848, it was no longer merely a question of the excluding force of circumstantial pressures and priorities: the 'revolutionary spirit' was *intrinsically* inimical to thought (or 'intelligence') because it was committed to a democratic 'levelling' of spirit; everything it touched it debased.[76] Crucially, it threatened to sap the foundations of the culture of the classic. Already in the 1840s he noted in his private diary: 'Nous allons tomber dans une grossièrté immense: le peu qui nous restait de la *Princesse de Clèves* (et Dieu sait qu'il ne nous en restait pas grand'chose) va s'abîmer pour jamais et s'abolir' (We are about to fall victim to an immense grossness: the little that is left to us of the *Princesse de Cleves* (and God knows there remains precious little) will be spoiled forever and disappear).[77] In his own comments on the educational debates over the respective claims of the modern sciences and the classical languages and literatures, the metaphor of 'invasion' is joined by that of 'assault':

Une révolution politique survenant (en 1848), on avait pu craindre que l'enceinte classique ne fût envahie et comme emportée d'assaut … Jamais, je l'espère bien, une

[73] Its political determination becomes even clearer if we juxtapose the treatment of Desmoulins with that accorded the apostle of anti-Revolution, Joseph de Maistre. De Maistre's more hysterical moments are noted as a regrettable stylistic lapse motivated by ardent passions. The infelicities of Desmoulins's heated prose are not a mere matter of regret; they are to be deplored.

[74] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York, 1965), 241–4.

[75] *Pr.L.* i. 362–71.

[76] 'il n'y a rien de plus décourageant pour la pensée que l'esprit révolutionnaire' (there is nothing more discouraging for thought than the revolutionary mentality) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 78).

[77] Quoted in Raphaël Molho, *L'Ordre et les ténèbres ou la naissance d'un mythe du XVIIe siècle chez Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1972), 208.

telle négation du passé n'eût pu prendre et réussir absolument en France, dans cette France où le génie littéraire a sa patrie, où la tradition du talent a ses autels, où le sentiment de la beauté latine et de la grandeur romaine a passé si profondément dans notre veine nationale et dans nos propres origines.

With the outbreak of a political revolution (in 1848), it was possible to fear that the classical stronghold had been invaded and as it were taken by assault … I do hope that such a negation of the past could never have absolutely succeeded in taking hold in France, in this France where literary genius has its fatherland, where altars are raised to the tradition of talent, where the feeling for Latin beauty and Roman grandeur has so deeply entered our national bloodstream and our very origins.[78]

## IV

Once again we encounter the meaning and uses of Rome, now as a bulwark against the 'internal' enemies gathered under the banner of democracy and revolution. In the 1850 article on Desmoulins, written several months after the Legislative Assembly considered revising the electoral law so as to exclude the 'vile multitude' from the right to vote, Sainte-Beuve berates as 'immoral' Desmoulins's proposal for breaking the link between the suffrage and property.[79] The cultural cognate of the principle of universal suffrage was the emergent popular voice in the literary sphere, and in particular popular poetry. This was a voice sponsored (in varying degrees of good faith) by Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Hugo, and George Sand.[80] Sainte-Beuve is sometimes placed in this company,[81] but in many respects his position was far closer to that of the group mustered around the *Revue des deux mondes* (Lerminier and Mazade in particular). In 1841 Lerminier, otherwise well known for his liberal–republican views, intervened on the question of contemporary popular poetry in an article entitled 'De la littérature des ouvriers', whose argument was designed to identify the two main terms of his title as a contradiction in terms. Lerminier subscribes to Sainte-Beuve's

[78] *CL* ix. 276–8. Charles Maurras (of whom more in Ch. 11) posited the relation between revolution and the classic as follows: 'Nommer classique l'esprit de la Révolution, c'était donc dépouiller un mot de son sens naturel et préparer des équivoques' (To call the spirit of the Revolution classical is to deprive a word of its natural meaning and institute misunderstandings) (*Romantisme et révolution* (Paris, 1922), 270).

[79] *CL* iii. 112. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the issue of universal suffrage was at the heart of the right-wing backlash against 'democracy' (see Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième république des lettres* (Paris, 1983), 265–304).

[80] See Édouard Dolléans, *Féminisme et mouvement ouvrier: George Sand* (Paris, 1951), 13–16; Edmond Thomas (ed.), *Voix d'en bas: La Poésie ouvrière au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1979), 63–8.

[81] Dolléans, *Féminisme et mouvement ouvrier*, 82.

(bourgeois) conception of a limited literary democracy whereby there is—or rather was, in the now irrecoverable conditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—an honourable place for the second-order writer in the national equivalent of the republic of letters ('les auteurs du second et même du troisième ordre' (authors of the second and even the third rank)[82]). In the conditions of the nineteenth century, however, this sense of a hierarchically ordered collective effort has dissipated in the 'mouvement anarchique' of the new individualism; 'everyone' wants to be a writer. This vanity-induced malady begins with the middle class, but then, in a further and utterly disastrous turn, also takes hold of the working class.

The latter—or the 'peuple'—naturally has its rights, but these are essentially the rights of the child. On the other hand, while there are 'analogies frappantes' between 'l'état moral de l'enfant et celui du peuple' (the moral condition of the child and that of the people), the latter possesses an earnest wish to develop, a desire, not merely 'respectable' but 'sacred', to accede to the adult sphere of the moral life ('s'élever à la vie morale' (raise itself to the level of the moral life)). In this worthy aspiration to enlightenment, the 'people' (the term will very shortly shift to 'artisan' and then 'ouvrier') needs a helping hand from those already in the enlightened state. A scheme of popular 'instruction' is thus essential, especially a scheme ('une instruction saine et morale' (a healthy and moral instruction)) that will steer the working class away from the false ideas, culpable passions, and moral confusions that have been one of the 'principales causes de l'association sinistre du bien et du mal dans l'histoire de notre révolution' (principal causes of the sinister association of good and evil in the history of our revolution).[83]

These, of course, are the commonplace sentiments of the well-intentioned discourse of 'reform' and are to be found everywhere in the period. What is of interest here is their application to the particular question of a working-class literature and more specifically of a 'popular' poetry. For on the long and arduous road to get the working classes to the requisite level of the moral life, there is already a major stumbling block; right at the beginning of this *longue durée* project there is a rude and clamorous interruption: the workers, before they have learnt how to read well (or to read at all), are also proposing to *write*, to cross the dividing line of manual and mental labour in order to become themselves agents of literary production. This ambition has nothing of the respectable or the sacred to it. It is a violation of the 'providential' law governing the division of labour ('l'équité distributive de la Providence') according to which the

[82] Jean-Louis Eugène Lerminier, 'De la littérature des ouvriers', *Revue des deux mondes*, 28 (1841), 957.

[83] Ibid. 955–6.

worker's reward for an exhausting day's labour is the peace of mind induced by exhaustion, since, in leaving no energy for further active pursuits, it happily anaesthetizes the mind to the desires and torments of futile literary ambition:

> Que de fois, en voyant vers la fin de la journée l'ouvrier au bras vigoureux, aux larges épaules, à la démarche un peu alourdie par la fatigue, regagner le gîte où il doit retrouver le repas du soir et le sommeil, nous avons songé à l'équité distributive de la Providence qui a voulu qu'avec la tâche de la journée finissent pour lui toutes les inquiétudes et tous les chagrins! Son labeur a été pénible, mais du moins, quand il l'a terminé, il échappe à toutes ces douleurs artificielles et vives que nous crée à nous, hommes d'étude et du monde, le raffinement de nos passions. Des veilles ardentes n'allumeront pas son imagination, et n'attiseront pas dans son cerveau ces excitations redoutables qui tiennent l'esprit et le destin d'un homme suspendu entre le délire et le génie.
>
> How often on seeing at the end of the day the strong-limbed, broad-shouldered worker, his step a trifle heavy from fatigue, on his way home to the lodging where he will find his evening meal and sleep, have we thought of the distributive equity of Providence assuring that with the day's work accomplished there is an end to all his anxieties and troubles. His labour has been hard, but at least, when he has finished it, he escapes from all those artificial and lively pains that the refinement of our passions creates for those of us who lead studious and worldly lives. The ardent vigils of the night will not inflame his imagination, nor feed in his brain those fearsome excitations that take hold of the mind and destiny of a man suspended between delirium and genius.[84]

The worker, then, should count his blessings, but, inexplicably, has failed to do so; the demons of desire and pride have penetrated even the thick upholstery of fatigue: 'l'ouvrier rêve la gloire des lettres' (the worker dreams of literary fame). Consider the case of the hapless Adolphe Boyer, whose semi-delirious excursus into writing and publication eventuates only in the disintegration of a life and ultimate suicide ('Il ne devait arriver à la célébrité d'un jour qu'à travers le suicide' (he was destined to attain twenty-four hours of fame only through suicide) is Lerminier's cool conclusion).[85] Prime culprit in this transgression of the providential order is Agricol Perdiguier, the most determined and articulate nineteenth-century campaigner for the idea of a modern popular literature and in particular popular poetry. Perdiguier's *Livre du compagnonnage* was an attempt to bring the oral *chansonnier* culture out of the restricted sphere of the artisan guilds into the wider public sphere of modern print culture. Lerminier notes this as its central aim ('Enfin les chansons du compagnonnage ne se contentent plus de la tradition orale; elles passent dans la littérature écrite' (In short, the journeymen's songs do not make do with the oral tradition; they pass into written literature)[86]), but only to identify it as a serious error. There can indeed be such a thing as a

[84] Ibid. 958. [85] Ibid. 960. [86] Ibid. 960.

'poète populaire', but this should not be confused with a 'poète du peuple'. The distinction is exemplified by the case of Béranger, who, while writing notionally 'for' the people, is himself detached from them by virtue of being educated and above all well connected (that is to say, in the right class).[87]

The project of a genuine worker-poetry, on the other hand, is not only implausible and impractical, given the life conditions of the worker; it is also dangerous. It is dangerous on three fronts. First, to the worker himself, inflaming his mind and dislocating—even destroying—his life with improbable fantasies of literary glory. Secondly, it is a danger for literature (its further adulteration in a culture already swamped with shoddy ephemera). Thirdly, it is a danger to 'society'. One of Perdiguier's goals was to use networks of publication and readership to effect a unification of the traditionally splintered and antagonistic labour corporations. In Lerminier's account of this objective, this was tantamount to the attempted formation of 'une espèce de ligue, d'association politique de la classe ouvrière' (a kind of league, a political association of the working class), a formation 'subversive de l'unité sociale' because conducive to insurrection and civil war ('la guerre civile est au fond de cette théorie' (civil war lies at the heart of this theory)).[88]

When we bear in mind the desperate fate of so many of the aspirant worker-poets (described by Jacques Rancière[89] ), the first of Lerminier's claims was all too true. But its burden was of course less a hardheaded recognition of facts on the ground than a complacent injunction issued to the worker to remain in his properly appointed place. For the law of the division of labour is not only providentially ordained but also a thing of nature, and hence immutable ('La division du travail, qui assigne aux uns l'action, aux autres la pensée, est donc toujours dans la nature des choses' (the division of labour that assigns action to some, thought to others, is thus in the nature of things)[90]). Under the aegis of this law, while one can rearrange—democratize—the republic of letters according to Christ's many-mansions saying ('on peut appliquer à la république des lettres cette parole du Christ, qu'il y a plusieurs places dans la maison de mon père' (one can apply to the republic of letters Christ's dictum of there being many mansions in the house of my father)[91]), there can be no room in this rearranged space for the worker-poet.

Sainte-Beuve, we recall, was also to invoke Christ's saying in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' in support of his ecumenical view of the literary classic. There is no

[87] Lerminier, 'De la littérature des ouvriers', 968. [88] Ibid. 963
[89] Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit de prolétaires: Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris, 1981).
[90] Lerminier, 'De la littérature des ouvriers', 975. [91] Ibid. 969.

reason to believe that he would have seriously disputed Lerminier's exclusions from this broad church, partly on standard critical grounds of quality, but also for reasons that were more openly political (most notably the feared association of popular poetry with the spirit of revolution). Since Lerminier's article was published in the *Revue des deux mondes*, it is likely that Sainte-Beuve read it, and equally likely that Lerminier read Sainte-Beuve's 'Dix ans après en littérature', also published in the same journal the previous year, with its call for the restriction of the idea of literary 'democracy' ('des mœurs littéraires d'une juste et saine démocratie') to an elite corps of professionals. Sainte-Beuve certainly admired Lerminier, publishing in the early 1830s two substantial and, with certain reservations over his famously intemperate manner, broadly laudatory reviews of Lerminier's books (*Lettres philosophiques adressées à un Berlinois* and *De l'influence de la philosophie du XVIII siècle sur la législation et la sociabilité du XIXe*).[92] However, Sainte-Beuve did not go so far as simply to banish the worker-poet. Indeed, in the aftermath of the July Revolution he joined with Lamartine, Hugo, and Sand in construing the glory of *les trois glorieuses* as in part the promise of a time in which 'peuple et poètes vont marcher ensemble' (people and poets will march together).[93] The insurrections of 1848 put paid to that naive prophecy once and for all (whereas George Sand fought strenuously to breathe new life into it). On the massive circulation of popular songs and poems during February and June[94] there is not a word, although in the *Lundis* of the early 1850s—it can be no coincidence that this was also the moment at which he turned his attention back to the question of revolution and the meaning of 1789—he was to break his silence with a series of articles on the popular poets so overbearingly prescriptive and censorious in approach as to blur definitively the dividing line between critical review and political lecture.

In any case, even well before 1848, Sainte-Beuve's view of the potential unison of poet and people was conditional on both behaving themselves. His model popular writers had always been the amiably docile ones, preferably hailing from, or securely installed in, the respectable middle classes: Delavigne, Désaugiers, and—though here the case is a complex one—Béranger. In 1845 the pro-Bourbon court jester to the Restoration, Désaugiers, was commended for supplying 'la sécurité complète résultant de l'entière cordialité' (the complete security that derives from total cordiality), and lamented as 'ce dernier représentant de la gaieté française' (that last representative of French gaiety).[95] In the 'éloge' delivered to the Académie, also in 1845, on taking the seat made vacant by the death of Casimir Delavigne, Sainte-Beuve described the latter warmly as

[92] *Pr.L.* ii. 116–25, 236–47.
[93] *Pr.L.* i. 405.
[94] See Thomas, *Voix d'en bas*, 52.
[95] *PC* v. 70, 76.

un poète à la fois populaire et modéré … Casimir Delavigne, poète, sut être toujours à l'unisson, au niveau du sentiment public; il partagea les goûts, les émotions, les enthousiasmes du grand nombre en ce qu'il eut d'honnête, de légitime, de généreux; il en fut l'organe clair, ingénieux, élégant, sensible.

at once a popular and moderate poet … Casimir Delavigne, as poet, always knew how to be in unison with, at the level of, public sensibility; he shared the tastes, the emotions, the enthusiasms of the majority by virtue of everything about him that was honest, legitimate, generous; as its public organ, he was clear, ingenious, elegant, sensitive.[96]

In this collocation of epithets—which, taken together, form a kind of Beuvian recipe book for an acceptable popular literature—the one with the loudest political resonance was of course *légitime*. The legitimacy of Delavigne's popular appeal derived from his articulation of a 'national' consensus around the 'liberal' values of the July Monarchy (at a time when liberalism was exposing dramatic faultlines in the 'nation' through the relentless pauperization of the working classes). Delavigne remained in tune with the 'people' (that is, the middle classes) to the extent that he gave voice to that liberal myth.

The insurrections of 1848 seemed to fracture the myth beyond conceivable repair. But in the 'reparative' climate of the Second Empire, the notion of there being legitimate bounds to popular self-expression returned in a new guise, this time in connection with the worker-poets themselves and with an overtly disciplinary aim in mind. In 1851 he delivered his first lesson on the nature and obligations of the 'popular Muse', in an account of Pierre Dupont and Hégésippe Moreau:

Le caractère propre de la Muse populaire, c'est qu'elle soit avant tout pacifique, consolante, aimante; que la Chanson de chaque métier, par exemple, en exprime la joie, l'orgueil même et la douce satisfaction; qu'elle en accompagne et en soulage le labeur; qu'elle en marque les moments et les rende plus égayés et plus légers.

The distinctive character of the popular Muse is to be above all peaceable, consoling, caring; for the Song of every trade, for example, to express its particular joy, even its pride and its sweet satisfactions; for it to accompany and soothe the work of labour; for it to register its moments and render them lighter and more cheerful.[97]

Those who submit obediently to this job description deserve and receive an indulgent nod of approval. Jasmin, cheering us with the sunny notes of his Provençal patois, showed what the way forward for a discontented working class might have been: 'Avant la révolution de Février, en avril 1847, dans la pièce intitulée *Riche et Pauvre*, ou *les Prophètes menteurs*, il montrait la bienfaisance des uns désarmant la colère et l'envie des autres, et faisait mentir les sinistres prédictions' (Before the February Revolution, in April 1847, in the

[96] *PC* v. 170–1. [97] *CL* iv. 72.

play titled *Riche et Pauvre*, or *les Prophètes menteurs*, he showed the charity of some disarming the anger and envy of others, and gave the lie to alarming predictions).[98] That this prophylaxis failed to deliver the desired outcomes should not, however, blind us to the usefulness of a popular poet like Jasmin; Sainte-Beuve quotes with relish the remark of an unnamed colleague: 'Si la France possédait dix poètes comme Jasmin, dix poètes de cette influence, elle n'aurait pas à craindre des révolutions' (If France possessed ten poets like Jasmin, ten poets with this influence, she would no longer have to fear revolutions).[99] Short of this preventative function, if the worker must sing the sufferings of his or her class, it should be done discreetly and decorously, above all without noise and rancour. The women poets are, naturally, especially gifted in the arts of self-restraint. Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, 'née dans la classe du peuple, était restée une âme plébienne; mais elle l'était sans prévention, sans parti pris, sans mettre sans cesse en avant ce qui divise et ce qui sépare' (a daughter of the people, she remained a plebeian soul; but she was such without prejudice, without bias, without ceaselessly foregrounding what divides and separates),[100] while—Sainte-Beuve's attention wandering momentarily as he surveys the bleak scene of contemporary mainstream poetry—Madame Blanchecotte, *ouvrière et poète*, brings, simultaneously and felicitously, to the expression of her distress 'la pudeur de la muse et celle de la femme' (the modesty of the muse and that of the woman).[101] Best of all, however, is for pain, suffering, and distress—and hence the world of manual labour—to disappear entirely. Poetry after all is about the 'ideal', about 'harmony', and thus the royalist baker-poet from Nîmes, Joseph Reboul (elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1848, he defended his convictions against all-comers), gets the following accolade (this moreover from an earlier text on Jasmin, in 1837):

> Reboul est un poète français, de l'école des *Méditations*; il écrit et chante en notre français avec pureté, harmonie; son originalité consiste bien plutôt dans le contraste de ses écrits avec sa profession … Obligé à un état manuel, et bien qu'il n'en rougisse pas, Reboul ne s'en glorifie non plus et ne s'y complaît pas; religieux de cœur, il accepte ce lot comme une part de la tâche imposée par le Maître … le *four* ne revient pas là sous toutes sortes de formes, et le poète, un moment soustrait aux soins vulgaires, s'efforce bien plutôt de les oublier, de les ennoblir en les idéalisant.
>
> Reboul is a French poet out of the school of the *Méditations*; he writes and sings in our language with purity, harmony; his originality derives rather from the contrast between his writings and his profession … Tied to manual labour, and while never being ashamed of it, Reboul nonetheless does not glorify it or delight in it; religious at heart, he accepts this lot as part of a task imposed by the Master … the *oven* does

[98] *CL* iv. 328. [99] *CL* iv. 329. [100] *NL* xii. 186. [101] *CL* xv. 328.

not here recur in its various guises, and the poet, temporarily removed from lowly concerns, tries rather to forget them, to ennoble them by idealizing them.[102]

Unlike Lerminier, then, Sainte-Beuve does not impose a blanket, a priori exclusion of the worker from the republic of letters. There are, however, strict terms and conditions of membership. Where these are incompletely respected or wilfully ignored, Sainte-Beuve moves fast towards the position of Lerminier in conjuring the frightful image of the barricade out of the actuality or prospect of a worker-poetry. Dupont, for example, troubles him for just this reason. Baudelaire also associated the barricades of 1848 with Dupont's brand of lyric, but in terms held to be enabling ('La Révolution de Février activa cette floraison impatiente et augmenta les vibrations de la corde populaire' (The February Revolution stirred this eager flowering and accentuated the vibrations of the popular chord)).[103] For Sainte-Beuve, on the other hand, these were the unbearably discordant notes of the popular lyre. Dupont was a poet of many registers, but was at his most impressive when true to his 'better nature': 'M. Pierre Dupont, qui est un chanteur à la fois populaire et de salons, socialiste pur si l'on en croit quelques-un de ses vers, belliqueux et même violent à certains jours, rural, agreste et pacifique, je le crois, quand il est dans sa meilleure et sa première nature' (M. Pierre Dupont, simultaneously a minstrel of the people and of polite society, a pure socialist if one goes by some of his occasionally bellicose and even violent lines, but bucolic, rustic, and peaceable, I believe, when true to his best and first nature).[104] But when, in more bellicose mood, Dupont strays towards the barricade, Sainte-Beuve's tone become altogether more nervous and threatening: 'Et pour résumer, non pas mon jugement (ce serait prématuré), mais tout mon vœu sur lui, je dirai: Il a en ce moment la vogue … Qu'il en use en véritable artiste et en véritable ami de son pays; car il lui en sera demandé compte' (And to summarize, not my judgement (which would be premature), but all that I wish for him, I will say: he is at present in fashion … May he use this as a true artist and as a friend of his country; otherwise he will be called to account).[105]

Anyone doubting the political motivation of this aggressively edged calling to account need only turn to the much later text where, in respect of the fiercely satirical verse of the Savoyard worker-poet, Jean-Pierre Veyrat, admonition *de haut en bas* modulates into outright invective: 'L'Homme rouge de Lyon n'est qu'un insulteur à rimes riches, et ce que j'ai vu de l'Homme rouge de Paris ne m'a point paru meilleur' (The Red from Lyon is but someone who insults in rich rhymes, and what I have seen of the Red from Paris did not strike me as better).[106] If, from Sainte-Beuve's

[102] *PC* iii. 66. [103] Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 610.
[104] *CL* iv. 69. [105] *CL* iv. 75. [106] *NL* x. 133.

repeated insistence on keeping the literary and the political apart, we think this is a purely stylistic judgement, then it is not long before we see our mistake. In 1838 Veyrat converted abruptly to the Catholic and monarchical cause ('un ordre de considérations le plus antirévolutionnaire possible,' in Sainte-Beuve's account). Sainte-Beuve notes that, from a literary point of view, this was merely to exchange one set of commonplaces for another, but then adds the crucial rider that at least the new set was ideologically more congenial: 'Il prophétisa encore, et en sens inverse. Quelques-uns diront qu'il n'avait fait que changer de lieux communs: il les choisit du moins, cette fois, plus élevés et plus nobles' (He still played the prophet, in reverse direction. Some will say that he merely changed commonplaces; this time at least his choice is loftier and nobler).[107] It seems that, when it came to disturbing or securing the peace, there were commonplaces and commonplaces.

For the most part, however, these remarks on nineteenth-century popular poetry were intermittent asides, temporary distractions in the running commentary on the impact of 'democracy' on the literary health of the nation. The one great exception to this cursory treatment was Béranger, to whom Sainte-Beuve returned at various junctures across a span of some thirty years, in an evolving reflection and assessment that almost perfectly mirror the contracting remit he was prepared to grant to the very idea of a 'people's' poetry. In the two articles published in 1832 and 1833, Béranger is positioned as the exemplary popular poet ('populaire à la lettre' (literally popular)[108]), the poet 'qui a fait acte de présence dans les rangs de la pure démocratie' (who has taken a position in the ranks of pure democracy).[109] The criteria of 'pure democracy' here are not, as with Delavigne, the formal political values of liberalism, but rather identification with and expression of the needs of the proletariat: 'Béranger a dramatisé, sous ces figures populaires, toute une économie politique impuissante, tout un système d'impôts écrasants; il a touché en plein la question d'égalité réelle, du droit à travailler, à posséder, à vivre, la question, en un mot, du prolétaire' (Beneath these popular figures, Béranger has staged in its entirety an impotent political economy, a whole system of crushing taxes; he has gone to the heart of the question of real equality, the right to work, to own, to live, in a word, the question of the proletarian).[110]

In other words, at this stage Sainte-Beuve would not have endorsed Lerminier's distinction between a popular poet and a poet of the people. Béranger was simultaneously both. By the time he next revists Béranger, in the 1850 review of the collected *Chansons*, the terms of evaluation have changed. The *chanson* is a marginal poetic genre, and, while Béranger is perfectly at

[107] *NL* x. 143. [108] *PC* i. 105. [109] *PC* i. 128. [110] *PC* i. 131.

home in it, there are intrinsic limits to what the genre allows.[111] But, of the various *chansonnier* modes adopted by Béranger, it was undoubtedly 'la chanson libérale et patriotique, qui fut et restera la grande innovation' (the liberal and patriotic song, which was and will remain his great innovation).[112] The identification of liberalism with patriotism thus reappears, displacing the earlier stress on Béranger as the poet of the proletariat. If the latter notion still lurks somewhere beneath the surface, it is invoked only to rebuke Béranger for having muddied 'patriotism' with rebellious sentiments during the heady moments of the Second Republic: 'Homme d'un patriotisme sincère, il est évident aujourd'hui qu'en poussant trop au triomphe des passions et à l'explosion des sentiments populaires, il n'avait pas assez songé au lendemain' (Albeit a sincere patriot, it is clear today that, in pushing too hard on the exultant passion and the explosion of popular feeling, he had not reflected enough on the aftermath).[113] The 'lendemain' was of course 1848. Béranger presumably would have done well to listen to Jasmin, but at least he was to do penance for his misguided enthusiasms. Sainte-Beuve reports the conversation alleged to have taken place between Chateaubriand and Béranger: 'Eh bien! Votre République, vous l'avez', Béranger's reply ('Oui je l'ai, mais j'aimerais mieux la rêver que la voir') eliciting from Sainte-Beuve the patronizing comment: 'Ce mot-là, il l'a bien dit. J'y verrais le texte de tout un commentaire moral à l'adresse de ceux qui se font une idole de la popularité' ('So then, you have your Republic' … 'Yes, I have it, but would prefer dreaming it to seeing it' … 'That was well said. I would be inclined to see in it the text of a whole moral commentary addressed to those who idolize popularity').[114]

The image of Béranger as the people's poet was therefore to be refurbished with a change of ideological clothing. The term *peuple* in Béranger's verse is misused when linked to class conflict: 'Mais il a pris trop souvent, ce me semble, le mot *peuple* dans un sens étroit, il l'a pris dans un sens qui est celui de l'opposition et du combat des classes' (But, it seems to me, he too often took the word *people* in its narrow sense, the sense of class opposition if only he hadand struggle).[115] The right way in which to take the term is made clear in the obituary piece written on Béranger's death in 1857, the attendance of the Emperor at the funeral doubtless providing a spur to semantic clarification.[116] Louis-Napoleon's presence 'a montré qu'ici comme

[111] *CL* ii. 296. [112] *CL* ii. 287. [113] *CL* ii. 298.
[114] *CL* ii. 299. [115] *CL* ii. 299.
[116] Sainte-Beuve's obituary was written at the request of the then Ministre de l'Instruction publique, Achille Fould. The funeral itself was appropriated and managed by the imperial state, backed by a substantial military and police presence to forestall protest at this annexation. The 'people's poet' had become the symbolic property of the Empire; and the assembled 'people'

en toute chose il sentait comme la France' (has shown that here as in all things he felt as France did).[117] In this he embodies a recovery of the oneness of nation and leader that Béranger had celebrated in his hymns to Napoleon I as the pure accents of 'une âme nationale et guerrière' (a national and warlike soul)[118] (if there is anywhere we hear the tones of Maurras *avant la lettre*, it is here). Sainte-Beuve's great regret is that Béranger did not see fit to sing the virtues of the Second Empire in the way he had toasted the First. If only he had been tempted by the natural subject-matter to hand: '*Le retour de l'armée de Crimée et son entrée dans Paris*, quel sujet d'héroïque chanson pour Béranger!' (*The return of the army from Crimea and its entry into Paris*, what a subject for a heroic song by Béranger!).[119] In this astonishing counterfactual fantasy of what Béranger might (usefully) have written, as distinct from what he actually wrote,[120] there is a definitive eclipse of the idea of the people's poet as spokesman for the poor and the dispossessed. Instead, the category of the *peuple* is folded into a flag-waving militarized patriotism, and the poet of the People becomes indistinguishable from the poet of the Ruler and the State. Béranger, in short, both missed the historical boat and let the side down, although, in his last article devoted to Béranger (on the correspondence in 1861), Sainte-Beuve credited him with at least having had

was shocked, outraged, and intimidated. André Billy cites the report of an (unattributed) eye witness: 'Béranger a été enterré par autorité de police. Ils ont enlevé son corps encore chaud et l'ont transporté en toute hâte au cimitière douze heures après sa mort. Malgré les défenses de l'autorité et la surprise de cette précipitation, le peuple est accouru en foule. Je me suis trouvé en face des barrages du Temple, au milieu des masses ouvrières. Tout le monde était indigné. J'ai vu défiler le cortège à deux pas de moi. C'était navrant … Arrivés au boulevard, nous avons trouvé en face de nous plusieurs régiments rangés en bataille, baïonnettes en avant. Il a fallu rétrograder' (Béranger was buried under the aegis of police authority. The body was removed while still warm and rapidly transported to the cemetery twelve hours after his death. Despite the precautions of the authorities and the surprise-effect of these hasty manœuvres, the people flocked en masse. I found myself in front of the roadblocks in the Temple quarter, in the middle of the working masses. Everyone was indignant. I saw the cortege file past two feet from me. It was heart-breaking … Once we had arrived at the boulevard, we found ourselves confronted by several regiments in battle formation, bayonets drawn. We had to pull back) (*Sainte-Beuve: Sa vie et son temps* (2 vols.; Paris, 1952), ii. 87–8). Among the government *invités* was Sainte-Beuve. Billy also notes that, as a gesture of thanks to Sainte-Beuve for his obituary piece (specifically, one presumes, for its flattering references to the Emperor), Louis-Napoleon presented him with a gift of two Sèvres vases. There have been various attempts to repackage Sainte-Beuve's rallying to the imperial regime and the Party of Order, but, however prettily wrapped, the evidence points only to a brutally simple conclusion: Sainte-Beuve's accommodation was, for the most part, sycophantic, pusillanimous, dishonest, and opportunistic.

[117] *CL* xv. 333. [118] *CL* xv. 335. [119] *CL* xv. 337.

[120] In the 1850 article Sainte-Beuve says of the songs since 1848 'il n'y a rien à dire, sinon qu'elles n'offrent qu'un petit nombre de traits heureux, et qu'elles sont en général pénibles, rocailleuses et dures' (there is nothing to say about them except that they offer merely a small number of felicitous characteristics and that in general they are tedious, harsh, and hard) (*CL* ii. 301).

the good sense to rally to the regime ('il n'y porta point d'enthousiasme, mais il eut le bon sens de comprendre où était le salut de la France, et que, de plus, il lui serait ridicule, à lui qui avait tant fait pour entretenir par ses refrains le culte de Napoléon, de ne pas accepter les conséquences' (he showed no enthusiasm for this, but had the good sense to recognize where the salvation of France lay, and, in addition, to see that it would have been ridiculous for him, who had done so much in his refrains to sustain the cult of Napoleon, not to accept the consequences)).[121] In fact even in his more militant phases, Béranger was never an apostle of revolution. Nevertheless, in this final assessment all trace of a radical politics has to be expunged. What is left as the legacy of Béranger is somewhat exiguous: Béranger as the poet of old France, the harmlesslessly irreverent tradition of 'gauloiserie' ('la goguette, la gaudriole, la malice narquoise et gauloise' (merriness, broadness, sardonic Gaulish banter and roguishness)[122]); Béranger is thus finally placed as 'l'un des plus gentils esprits de la France' (one the most amiable minds of France), whose main characteristics are 'la bonté et la gaieté, et aussi bien souvent la grâce' (goodness and gaiety, and also very often charm).[123] We are back in the world of Delavigne and Désaugiers.

## V

This determined battening down of the hatches where the potential extension of literary democracy to an emergent popular voice was concerned implicated both ends of the cultural chain—not only production but also consumption. If the more radical of the popular poets needed to be reminded of their own 'best selves', their readers also needed to be protected from the dangerous excitements engendered by the 'free' expression of their worst selves. In 1840 Heine did a tour of the workshops of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau and reported back on what he discovered of the workers' reading habits ('which books were circulating amongst the workers, the most vigorous section of the lower classes'). What he discovered was hair-raising: 'I found there several new editions of Robespierre's speeches and Marat's pamphlets, issued in penny instalments, Cabet's history of the revolution, Cormenin's venomous lampoon, the doctrine and conspiracy of Babeuf by Buonarotti, etc., writings flavoured as it were with a smell of blood—and I heard songs being sung which seemed to have been composed in hell, and whose refrains bore witness

[121] *NL* i. 166–7. [122] *NL* i. 168. [123] *NL* i. 207.

to a fury, an exasperation which made one shiver.'[124] Sainte-Beuve would doubtless have been equally horrified; his reaction to the story recounted to him by the publisher of Lamennais's *Paroles d'un croyant* (the typesetters were so enthused as they set the book that they jumped onto their work tables to read passages out loud) was tepid. More notoriously, he was so disturbed by aspects of Lamennais's text that, having been entrusted with the manuscript but without any authorization, he struck out certain offending passages, especially those he found—in that adjective which for Sainte-Beuve always sets alarm bells ringing[125]—excessively 'déclamatoire'.[126]

In fact, the monitoring of popular reading had been a live issue from the abbé Grégoire's investigation into the itinerant book pedlars at the time of the French Revolution to the commission on *colportage* headed by Charles Nisard at the beginning of the Second Empire. These enquiries were complemented by other initiatives in the course of the nineteenth century, most notably proposals to regulate the 'cabinets de lecture' in the 1830s and 1840s and the later investigations of Louis-Napoleon's Ministre de l'Instruction publique, Rouland, into the desirability of instituting a system of 'bibliothèques populaires' with which to control patterns of reading. A particular source of concern was the popularity of the *roman-feuilleton*, although by the time of the Second Empire it had largely disappeared from the pages of the daily press (having been replaced by the *journaux-romans*, novels initially distributed in separate *livraisons* that were subsequently bound in cheap editions). Indeed, the anxiety over the social effects of contemporary popular fiction was so acute that it elicited not only the involvement of the Ministre de l'Instruction publique, but also, and more menacingly, a response from the Ministre de l'Intérieur, Billaut, in the form of a circular published in the government newspaper, *Le Moniteur*, in 1860 and widely discussed in the press. The Billaut circular left absolutely no doubt as to both its principal target and its proposed remedy:

> Ce n'est pas seulement pour le maintien de l'ordre que l'administration a reçu de la loi sur la presse des pouvoirs spéciaux; c'est aussi pour la défense de la morale publique. Le roman-feuilleton qui, dans les colonnes inférieures d'un journal, blesse les sentiments honnêtes, fait autant et peut-être plus de mal que les excitations politiques qui, dans les colonnes supérieures, tenteraient d'agir les esprits … Pour qui conserve encore quelque respect de la décence et du bon goût, un tel débordement est déplorable; il est plus que temps d'y mettre un terme. L'intelligence du peuple a droit à des aliments meilleurs, il ne faut pas plus laisser corrompre les cœurs que pervertir les esprits.

[124] Quoted in Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve*, 141–2.

[125] On the obsession with this term, and its political resonances, in Sainte-Beuve's critical discourse, see Fayolle, *Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle*, 53.

[126] See Michel Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 163–4.

It is not solely for the maintenance of order that the administration has acquired special powers from the press laws; it is also for the defence of public morality. The serial novel which, in the lower columns of a newspaper, does injury to honest sentiments, does as much and perhaps more harm than the political incitements which, in the upper columns, would seek to influence our minds … To anyone who still retains some respect for decency and good taste, such dissipation is deplorable; it is high time to put an end to it. The intelligence of the people is entitled to better nourishment, we must prevent the corruption of the heart as well as the perversion of the mind.[127]

Quite what the Ministry of the Interior sought to achieve (the actual effect of the circular was nugatory) is not clear. At one level its main preoccupation seemed to be with the potential 'corruption' of the bourgeois family; the complaint was about the influence on married women and innocent daughters of the 'depravity' of the *roman-feuilleton*, with a particular eye to the theme of sexual transgression (specifically adultery). On the other hand, the worry was as much political as social, to do with the capacity of popular writing to 'agitate' the mind (in the direction of popular revolt) as well as to 'corrupt' the heart. This concern was echoed in the discussions around the publication of the circular, the reactionary Granier de Cassagnac in particular linking the phenomenon to the propagation of 'socialism' by the novels of Sue.[128] Sainte-Beuve would probably not have dissented from most of this, short of the outright threat of government censorship. His preferred solution was less to extirpate than to educate, by the expedient of bringing the classics to the masses. One of the criteria of the 'enlarged' definition of the 'classic' proposed in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' was that it be 'accessible à tous'. What Sainte-Beuve meant here by 'tous' is unspecified (it may have been intended as referring only to all members of the educated classes), but, at the beginning of the year that saw the publication of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', Sainte-Beuve also took the question of accessibility into the lower orders, in a series of comments, both descriptive and prescriptive, on a recently instituted scheme for 'des Lectures du soir publiques, à l'usage des classes laborieuses', whose objective was to 'répandre le goût des choses de l'esprit' (to spread the taste for the things of the mind).[129]

The (French) classics, judiciously chosen and edited, were the centrepiece of this project.[130] This was an initiative of which Sainte-Beuve approved, while maintaining that more needed to be done to realize its full potential. In particular, it was vital to overcome a certain ministerial timidity arising from an association of the public readings with the former gatherings of the radical

[127] Marie-Christine Haro, 'La Circulaire Billaut', *Romantisme*, 53 (1986), 51.
[128] Ibid. 53. [129] *CL* i. 275.
[130] Here we find a partial and displaced recovery in a new mass context of two of the older associations of the term 'classic': school classroom and social class.

political clubs. This was a confusion generating a mistaken perception of the true effect of the public readings, which was to be a 'cure' for revolutionary infections (the quasi-medical notion of a carefully crafted diet of the classics as a 'cure' for the wrong kind of politics will resurface at a later stage in connection with Sainte-Beuve's view of the 'function' of criticism[131]): 'On avait eu tant d'horreur et de dégoût des clubs, que la prévention d'abord a pu s'étendre, par une association injuste, sur ce qui y ressemblait le moins, et qui était bien plutôt propre à en guérir' (One was so horrified and disgusted by the clubs that prevention was able to extend itself, by unfair association, to what least resembled them and was rather capable of offering a cure).[132] A case in point was the admirable efforts of Émile Souvestre, whose readings at the Conservatoire took place 'pas loin du clos Saint-Lazare' (not far from the Saint-Lazare enclosure), thus attracting 'bien des figures qui pouvaient être celles des combattants de la veille' (many who may well have figured among the combatants of yesterday). Souvestre's way with the former *quarante-huitards* was to choose texts designed 'pour dégoûter des guerres civiles' (to induce disgust for civil wars).[133]

The success of the enterprise depended, however, on certain conditions being satisfied. One set concerned the selection of texts and the manner of their presentation. The readings were not to be simply exercises in indoctrination, especially of the patriotic–nationalist sort. The workers are not children (in this Sainte-Beuve differs from his colleague Lerminier): 'dans le cas présent, on a affaire à des intelligences neuves, non pas molles et tendres comme celles des enfants, à des intelligences en général droites, saines, bien qu'en partie atteintes déjà par les courants déclamatoires qui sont dans l'air du siècle' (in the present case, we are dealing with fresh minds, not soft and tender like those of children, minds that in general are straight, healthy, even if in part already affected by the declamatory currents that belong to the atmosphere of our century' (those tell-tale opposing adjectives again, 'saines' and 'déclamatoires').[134] The

[131] See Ch. 9. [132] *CL* i. 276 [133] *CL* i. 285.

[134] *CL* i. 279. But he was to take a far less sanguine view of the common people's 'intelligence' in the article on Paul-Louis Courier: 'Paul-Louis Courier oublie trop que *Georges le laboureur, André le vigneron, Jacques le bonhomme* (comme il les appelle) n'ont rien qui les élève et les moralise, qui les détache de ces intérêts privés auquels ils sont tous acharnés et assujettis; qu'à un moment donné, s'il faut un effort, un dévouement, une raison supérieure d'agir, ils ne la trouveront pas, et qu'à de telles gens il faut une religion politique, un souvenir ou une espérance qui soit comme l'âme de la nation, quelque chose qui, sous Henri IV, s'appelait le Roi, qui plus tard s'appellera l'Empereur, qui, dans l'avenir, sera je ne sais quel nom: sans quoi, à l'heure du péril, l'esprit d'union et d'unité, le mot d'ordre fera faute et la masse ne se soulèvera pas' (Paul-Louis Courier all too easily forgets that *Georges le laboureur*, *André le vigneron*, *Jacques le bonhomme* (as he calls them) have nothing that elevates their moral tone, that detaches them from those private interests to which they are glued and subordinated; that if, at a given moment, what is needed is an effort, a devotion, a superior reason for acting, these will not be found

essential task is therefore one of intelligence management ('le grand art est de les ménager'), an operation that, amongst other things, requires a certain 'balance' (Souvestre wisely juxtaposing 'un joli conte' by Andrieux on the follies of politically irresponsible rabble rousers with a piece by Hugo on alms-giving to the suffering Poor, the latter a truly felicitous choice given the occasion of the public reading itself as the gratis distribution of morsels of cultural capital).

Another set of conditions, however, concerned the dispositions and attitudes of the audience. One condition was external: the importance of attending the readings in an appropriate 'esprit de bienséance' (attitude of decorum).[135] This was partly a matter of good behaviour (Souvestre's public of former insurrectionaries is commended for 'une parfaite bienséance … dans la salle avant l'arrivée du lecteur' (perfect decorum … in the room before the arrival of the reader)), and partly a matter of correct dress, the sort signifying respectful deference to this visitation from the Higher Culture: 'la plupart, en effet, ont quitté la blouse par un sentiment d'amour-propre pour eux-mêmes, et aussi d'égard et de respect pour les choses qu'ils viennent entendre et pour celui qui les lit' (the majority indeed have abandoned the smock from a feeling of self-respect, and also from consideration and respect for the things they have just heard and for him who reads them).[136] Another condition—or more strictly a precondition—was internal and infinitely more important: a certain 'improvement' in the collective mentality predisposing the worker to a favourable reception of the classics: 'l'esprit de la classe ouvrière à Paris *s'améliore*' (the mind of the working class in Paris *is improving*). This amelioration consists not in holding to a particular opinion but in recognizing past errors:

here, and that what such people need is a political religion, a memory or a hope resembling the soul of the nation, something that, under Henri IV, was called the King, that later was to be called the Emperor, and that, in the future, will be called I know not what: without which, at the perilous hour, the spirit of union and unity, the rallying cry, will be lacking and the masses will not rise up) (*CL* vi. 347). We might also note the deep irony of Charles Maurras's impressively lunatic proposal for a 'Sainte-Beuve Day' of 'national reconciliation', in which the example of Sainte-Beuve would serve in the defence of 'tous les pays de culture classique'. Such a day of commemoration would be of particular value to the common people, even the illiterate: 'Si l'on appelle peuple les illettrés, je répondrai qu'une fête de Sainte-Beuve ne l'ennuierait aucunement … Au contraire, il s'admirerait de toute son âme d'ainsi fêter autre chose que ses instincts … Il enrage de voir que l'on s'encanaille. Le bon peuple veut des modèles, et l'on s'obstine à lui présenter des miroirs' ( To those who term the people illiterates, my reply will be that it would not be vexed by a Sainte-Beuve Day … On the contrary, it would, with all its soul, be proud to celebrate something other than its instincts … It becomes furious when it sees itself turned into a rabble. The good side of the people wants models, and one persists in presenting it with mirrors) (*Trois idées politiques*, in *Romantisme et révolution*, 264). For further discussion of Maurras on Sainte-Beuve, see Ch. 11.

[135] *CL* i. 276. [136] *CL* i. 286–7.

S'améliorer, pour la classe laborieuse, ce n'est pas, selon moi, avoir telle ou telle idée politique, s'incliner vers tel ou tel point de vue social (j'admets à cet égard bien des dissidences), c'est tout simplement constater qu'on s'est trompé en comptant sur d'autres voies que celle du travail régulier; c'est rentrer dans cette voie en désirant tout ce qui peut la raffermir et la féconder. Quand la majeure partie d'une population en est là, et que les violents sont avertis peu à peu de s'isoler de la masse et de s'en séparer, je dis que la masse s'améliore, et c'est le moment pour les politiques prévoyants d'agir sur elle par des moyens honnêtes, moraux, sympathiques. Les lectures du soir, dans leur cadre modeste, sont tout cela.

Improvement, for the labouring class, is not, as I see it, having this or that political idea, inclining to this or that social point of view (in this respect I admit that there are many dissident voices), it consists quite simply in ascertaining that it was a mistake to count on channels other than that of steady work; it is to return to this channel armed with the desire to strengthen and fertilize it. When the larger part of a population stands there and the men of violence are warned to isolate themselves from the mass and separate themselves off, I maintain that the mass improves, and that is the moment for foresightful politicians to influence it by means that are honest, moral, sympathetic. The evening readings are, within their modest frame, exactly that.[137]

Both the precondition and the function of the public readings thus come together to produce an act of atonement and an occasion of absolution. What takes place in the Conservatoire is at once an implicit confession on the part of the errant workers and, under the benevolently watchful gaze of Souvestre the reader and Sainte-Beuve the observer, a benediction. There is a continuum here in Sainte-Beuve's view of contemporary popular culture. Along with the domestication of the worker-poet, warned to steer clear of revolutionary sentiments, we have the amelioration of the worker-reader (or listener). These proposals can, I suppose, be represented as the thoughts of a 'progressive' social thinker.[138] But to the sceptical eye they will look more like meat and drink to those of Foucauldian persuasions: 'improvement' as containment and happy pacification as *haute surveillance*.

Seventeen years later Sainte-Beuve returned to the question of popular reading, in his statement to the Senate on the place of both the classics and contemporary literature in Rouland's 'bibliothèques populaires'. The occasion was the sympathetic reception given by the more reactionary members of the Senate to a remarkable petition from the good citizens of Saint-Étienne. This was a demand for the immediate withdrawal from the library of a number of

[137] *CL* i. 292.

[138] Lepenies describes Sainte-Beuve's proposals as 'une démocratisation d'en haut soigneusement programmée' (a carefully programmed democratization from on high) as if this were not to some considerable extent a contradiction in terms (*Sainte-Beuve*, 145).

books deemed injurious to the public weal. They included: Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*, *Zadig*, and *Candide*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Proudhon's *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire*, the complete works of Balzac, Michelet, Renan, and George Sand. Sainte-Beuve's reaction was vitriol disguised in the smooth tones of civilized 'debate'. What the honourable members were proposing was censorship ('une note odieuse de censure' (an odious note of censorship)) and a secular equivalent of the Index ('instituer dans notre libre France une sorte d'*Index* des livres condamnés, comme à Rome' (institute in our free France a sort of *Index* of condemned books, as in Rome)).[139] This was unquestionably the bravest and the finest of his senatorial interventions, especially when, before a pack of right-wing politicians baying for blood, he went out on a limb in defence of Proudhon as proper reading matter for people: 'On peut être homme du peuple, homme de travail, et s'instruire en le lisant' (One can be a man of the people, a worker, and get instruction from reading him).[140] On the other hand, there was also a caveat, a characteristic Beuvian trimming of the sails to the prevailing winds. There could be no harm in the common people making contact with the ideas and passions of 'socialism', provided that socialism was stripped of revolutionary aspirations and rendered compatible with the goals of empire: 'Extraire ce qu'il y a de bon dans le socialisme pour le soustraire à la Révolution et pour le faire entrer dans l'ordre régulier de la société, m'a toujours paru une partie essentielle et originale de la tâche dévoluée au second Empire' (Extracting the good from socialism to remove it from Revolution and install it in the proper order of society has always seemed to me an essential and original part of the task that has fallen to the Second Empire).[141]

There was, of course, a certain political cunning in this attempt to outflank his adversaries by invoking the 'liberal' spirit of the Empire and enlisting the urbane and tolerant 'intelligence' of the Emperor in support of his cause ('un prince si remarquable par les dons de l'intelligence' (a prince whose intellectual gifts make him so remarkable)[142]). Yet it was also a tactic that required concessions on the terrain of debate occupied by the adversary: Sainte-Beuve freely acknowledged that the masses may be at risk before 'dangerous' reading material, but sought to turn the tables on his opponents and simultaneously palliate their fears, by arguing their own case for prevention in 'libertarian' terms: to prohibit such material merely accentuates the risk by whetting the appetite for what has been forbidden: 'Mais une telle défense, de votre part, mettrait un attrait de plus et comme une prime à tous les livres que vous interdisez' (But a defence of that type on your part would add yet another attraction and as it were a bonus to all the books that you

[139] *Pr.L.* iii. 215. [140] *Pr.L.* iii. 218. [141] *Pr.L.* iii. 219. [142] *Pr.L.* iii. 220.

prohibit).[143] A more successful strategy of containment would be permissive rather than repressive.[144] The main concession, however, was of a more general order, by virtue of which a version of effective censorship returned through the back door. What is not in dispute, Sainte-Beuve reassures the 'messieurs' of the Senate, is the need to 'apporter de la mesure et de la convenance dans les choix des bibliothèques populaires' (to bring moderation and propriety to the selections of the popular libraries).[145] Selection is essential. Thus when the petition includes a demand that 'all' of Balzac and George Sand be removed from the shelves of the popular libraries, Sainte-Beuve's query is: surely not *all*? Not *Eugénie Grandet* or *La Petite Fadette* and *La Mare au diable* ('toute une branche de romans champêtres, purs et irréprochables' (a whole branch of rustic novels, pure and irreproachable)[146]). But this implicitly invokes a model of 'healthy' reading, whose inclusions necessarily entail exclusions: some of Sand (*Le Compagnon du Tour de France* perhaps) and most of Balzac (too 'malsain') presumably can and should be edited out. Like the democracy of writing, the democracy of reading must have limits. But specifiying and patrolling these borders is a task for which the critic, in his role as 'public servant' ('rendre un service public et, j'ose dire, social' (to provide a public service and, dare I say it, a social one) is how he put it in 'Quelques vérités en littérature'[147]), is far better qualified than the politicians. Within the modern system of the division of labour, this is one of his properly appointed 'functions'. What that function looked like and what it was designed to secure is the topic of the next chapter.

[143] *Pr.L.* iii. 225.

[144] The journalist Auguste Villemot wrote in the *Chronique parisienne*: 'Le mouvement littéraire vient d'être défini par une circulaire du Ministre de l'Intérieur "une série de tableaux obscènes et d'images sensuelles" … L'immoralité de ces élucubrations est, paraît-il, un grand mal. Un plus grand mal, c'est qu'on ne les lisait pas, et que la circulaire du ministre donnera envie de les lire' (The literary current has just been defined by a circular from the Ministry of the Interior as 'a series of obscene pictures and sensual images' … The immorality of these lucubrations is, it seems, a great evil. An even greater evil would be if these things were not read and the Ministry circular aroused the desire to read them) (quoted in Haro, 'La Circulaire Billaut', 55).

[145] *Pr.L.* iii. 216. [146] *Pr.L.* iii. 220. [147] *PC* iii. 487.

# 9

# The Foundations of Culture

## I

Towards the end of the first decade of the July Monarchy an image appears in Sainte-Beuve's criticism, which retrospectively—from the vantage point of his work during the Second Empire—looks like the planting of a seed that was subsequently to yield a thick metaphorical outcrop. It is the image of the Dyke. Its first appearance seems to have been, significantly, in the 1839 article 'De la littérature industrielle', where the forces of *encanaillement* (the market, democracy, 'industrialization', the masses) are described as having launched a massive assault on the foundations of culture: 'Quelques plumes sages protestent cà et là, à la sourdine; mais la digue n'est nulle part' (Some wise pens protest here and there, in muted tones; but the dyke is nowhere to be found).[1] It reappears the following year in 'Dix ans en littérature', in the sketch of a 'politique de conservation' prescribed as a defensive action by a select group, an oddly conservative avant-garde, to be sent out to secure the frontline against the further encroachment of these destabilizing forces: 'Une critique nouvelle, et sans prétention de l'être, faisant digue, refaisant appui aux monuments, peut naître de là' (A new criticism, without claiming to be such, constituting a dyke, rebuilding support for the monuments, could come of this).[2] With the inauguration of the *Lundis*, the deployment of the image gathers pace. Against 'la grossièrté croissante, la grossièrté immense qui, de loin, ressemble à une mer qui monte' (a developing coarseness, an immense coarseness which, from far off, resembles a rising tide), there is the imperative 'd'y opposer ce qui reste encore de digues non détruites, et de prêter la main, en un mot, à tout ce qui s'est appelé jusqu'ici goût, politesse, culture, civilisation' (to oppose to this what remains of dykes not yet destroyed, and, in a word, to lend a hand to all that up till now has been called taste, politeness, culture, civilization).[3] In the conditions of the July Monarchy, this seemed an impossible project: 'Il n'y avait plus de digues' (There were no

[1] *PC* ii. 451. [2] *PC* ii. 489. [3] *CL* i. 48.

more dykes).[4] The major form of the engulfing tidal wave—revolution—was yet to come, but, while 1848 may have appeared to damage irreparably our faith in solidity and durability, the opportunity is now to hand to repair that damaged faith:

> Les brusques révolutions que font éclater les passions des hommes viennent sans doute déranger fréquemment cette marche générale graduelle des choses; la digue, que les sages essayaient de construire se trouve tout à coup submergée. Mais les flots passent, l'inondation baisse, et la digue insensiblement continue.
>
> The sudden revolutions that cause men's passions to explode doubtless frequently intervene to disrupt the general gradual march of affairs; the dyke, which the wise tried to construct, finds itself all at once submerged. But the waves pass, the flood recedes, and unseen the dyke continues.[5]

And so on.

It used to be fashionable to see recurring metaphor as the symptom or sign of obsession. But if, in quasi-psychoanalytical idiom, we can detect an obsessional structure at work in Sainte-Beuve's mind, it perhaps has less to do with the insistence of repetition than with the drive to proliferation. The true symptom of deep-seated, paranoid anxiety lies in the swarm of metaphor with which Sainte-Beuve's text builds, from the materials of a plurality of thematically related images, a reinforcing structure around the central analogy of the dyke, as if his text were trying to close the floodgates by all the figurative means at his disposal. To the fortifying dyke must be added the images of judicial tribunal, medical treatment, administrative regulation, audit office, vigilant patrol, sentry box, and military headquarters (with this last, the image is joined explicitly with the term *classique*).[6] We should perhaps press

[4] *CL* vi. 163.

[5] *CL* iii. 177–8. The original source of the dyke-metaphor for Sainte-Beuve may have been the writings of Joseph de Maistre. In the early portrait of de Maistre, Sainte-Beuve quotes the following passage on the French Revolution: 'Mais c'est précisément parce que la Révolution française, dans ses bases, est le comble de l'absurdité et de la corruption morale, qu'elle est éminemment dangereuse pour les peuples … Quelle *digue* opposer à une doctrine qui s'adressa d'abord aux passions les plus chères du coeur humain, et qui, avant les dures leçons de l'expérience, n'avait contre elle que les sages?' (But it is precisely because the French Revolution, at its foundations, is the height of absurdity and moral corruption that it is poses such a danger for the people … With what *dyke* can one oppose a doctrine which begins by appealing to the most cherished passions of the human heart and which, before the hard lessons of experience, had only the wise to resist it?) (*PL* 625, emphasis added).

[6] Examples from this cluster include the following: the critic as 'sentinelle hardie' (bold sentry) exercising a 'police extérieure' (an external police) (*PC* ii. 450–1); the view of Boileau as 'conseiller d'état dans l'ordre poétique, il faisait la police des livres' (a state counsellor in the sphere of poetry, he undertook the policing of books) (*NL* i. 300); Boileau again, along with Malherbe, as critics who 'remirent le bon ordre dans les choses de l'esprit et firent la police des Lettres' (restored good order to the things of the mind and undertook the policing of Letters)

but lightly on some of these analogies. The term 'police', for example, does not necessarily invoke a quasi-state apparatus of law and order. Similarly the idea of criticism as 'tribunal' turns as much on the principle of the judicious as that of the judicial.[7] What matters here, however, is less the precise drift of particular images than their cumulative effect, whereby, via a panoply of related figures, a series of fantasmatic role models for the critic is brought into view, all of which are either servants of the state or from the professional middle classes: policeman, soldier, doctor, judge, engineer, accountant, and bureaucrat.

These are the tones of the nineteenth-century conservative voice that was to become increasingly the voice of the mature Sainte-Beuve. Yet, while it is correct to describe the positions it articulated as 'conservative', the description remains merely banal and uninformative without somewhat elaborate further clarification. What, then, did it mean for someone like Sainte-Beuve to be a 'conservative' in the conditions of modernity? The metaphor of the dyke suggests that it has something to do with shoring up 'foundations'. But the foundational nature of Sainte-Beuve's conserving project is exactly the problem, imposed by the terms of his own reflection. In this connection, certain discriminations become essential. First, to describe Sainte-Beuve as a

(*CL* i. 374); the notion of the *grand siècle* as presided over by an adjudicating tribunal ('Les grands siècles ont toujours eu ainsi un juge, un tribunal dispensateur' (The great centuries have thus always had a judge, a tribunal dispensing justice) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 52) ); the journalist-critic who holds 'une clinique chaque matin au lit du malade, si l'on ose ainsi parler … cette critique pratique à laquelle les bien portants même, en littérature, n'échappent pas' (a daily clinic held by the bedside of the sick, if we may speak thus … that critical practice from which even the healthy, in literature, do not escape) (*PL* 251); the critic as Hippocrates ('L'autorité du vrai critique se compose de bien des éléments complexes, comme pour le grand médecin; mais au fond il y a là un sens à part, comme le tact d'un Hippocrate ou d'un Corvisart' (The authority of the true critic is made of many complex elements, as is the case with the great doctor; but at bottom there is here a distinctive sense, like the tact of a Hippocrates or a Corvisart) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 116)); modern literatures as 'les littératures qui n'ont point de capitale, de quartier général classique ni d'Académie' (literatures without a capital, without a classical headquarters or an Academy) (*CL* viii. 426). In his account of the role of the literary Academy, Matthew Arnold, quoting Sainte-Beuve, was to use a similar set of images: 'court', 'jury', 'tribunal' ('The Literary Influence of Academies', in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York, 1965), 270–1).

[7] The notion of the critic as 'judge' implies a priority granted to judgement to offset the neutralizing, because relativizing, effects of modern historical method. On the other hand, as Fayolle notes, 'il ne s'agit pas simplement de la résolution nouvelle d'un homme mûr, devenu plus sûr de ces préférences et de ces goûts; il s'agit surtout de la prise de conscience par Sainte-Beuve d'une fonction sociale de la critique: c'est une véritable magistrature qu'il est lâche de ne pas vouloir exercer avec rigueur et avec sévérité' (it is not just a question of the renewed resolution of a mature man, more confident in his preferences and tastes; it is above all a question of the conscious assumption by Sainte-Beuve of a social function for the critic: a veritable magistracy which it would be cowardly not to want to exercise with rigour and severity) (*Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle*, 52).

conservative is not to describe him as a reactionary, as someone who dreads the arrival of modernity and seeks, if only in imagination, to check or evade it. Whatever the (considerable) charms of the wistful look over the shoulder to a lost past, there can be no question of turning the clock back. In this regard, Sainte-Beuve was a resolute historical realist: we can and must live only within the options given by the historical moment we inhabit (and by the same token we should not judge past cultures in terms of options that were unavailable to them[8]): 'On ne naît pas quand on veut, on ne choisit pas son moment pour éclore' (one does not choose the time of one's birth, one does not choose one's moment of blossoming).[9] There were times when this bracing realism degenerated fast into the worst kind of tactical opportunism. Such was the case with the notorious 1852 article 'Les Regrets', which even Sainte-Beuve's most loyal admirers find hard to swallow. The 'regrets' in question were those of the political and intellectual power-brokers under Louis-Philippe's rule who, having found themselves, in the aftermath of the *coup d'état*, abruptly divested of privileges and influence, derided the new regime from the sidelines to which they had been confined. Sainte-Beuve was quite right to detect a strong element of *ressentiment* beneath the nostalgic lamentations and ironic jeremiads of this displaced generation, but ruined his case—and damaged his reputation—by his shameless grovelling to the new order (the Minister of Education, Fortoul, wrote to congratulate him, comparing his text to an essay by Montaigne).[10]

'Les Regrets' is probably the only truly disgraceful piece Sainte-Beuve ever wrote. In it historical realism serves merely to rationalize a version of winner's history. Elsewhere, however, it administered an inoculation against futile nostalgias for the irrecoverable and the retrograde (in, for example, his robust denunciation of the Restoration). Modernity—which in this context meant essentially the process of modernization under the twin aegis of science and industry—was here to stay, a fact of life, and it was best to welcome and cultivate what possibilities for human betterment it contained. In his review of the *Greek Anthology*, Sainte-Beuve argued that, while we should continue to revere antiquity, this should not stand in the way of embracing the achievements of the modern world:

[8] *NL* xiii. 292. See also the remark in the article on Mme de Staël: 'Les défenseurs d'un goût exclusif et d'une langue fixe jouent exactement en littérature un rôle de *tories*; ils sont pour une cause qui se perd journellement' (The defenders of an exclusive taste and a fixed language play for literature exactly the role of *tories*; they are for a cause that is daily being lost) (*PF* 120).

[9] *CL* xv. 370.

[10] André Billy, *Sainte-Beuve: Sa vie et son temps* (Paris, 1952), ii. 62. But, as Billy also notes regarding the target of Sainte-Beuve's attack, the behaviour of many of them during the death throes of the Second Republic had itself also been utterly shameless.

Les problèmes en art, en science, en industrie, en tout ce qui est de la guerre et de la paix, se posent pour nous tout autrement; nous avons l'étendue, la multitude, l'océan, tous les océans devant nous, des nations vastes, le genre humain tout entier: nous sondons l'infini du ciel; nous avons la clef des choses, nous avons Descartes, et Newton, et Laplace; nous avons nos calculs et nos méthodes, nos instruments en tout genre, poudre à canon, lunettes, vapeur, analyse chimique, électricité; Promethée n'a cesse de marcher et de dérober les dieux.

In all matters to do with war and peace, the problems of art, science, and industry are differently posed for us; we have space, multitude, the ocean, all the oceans before us, vast nations, the whole of mankind: we fathom the infinite of the heavens; we have the key to things, we have Descartes and Newton and Laplace; we have our calculus and our methods, all manner of instruments, gunpowder, glasses, steam, chemical analysis, electricity; Prometheus will not stop walking and stealing from the gods.[11]

Wolf Lepenies, while noting that Sainte-Beuve 'detested' irony, nevertheless invites us to see this passage as 'empreint d'ironie à chaque mot' (every word imprinted with irony).[12] But it is difficult to see even the outlines of this imprinting given both the regularity and the alacrity with which Sainte-Beuve hailed technological modernity, from the 1831 Saint-Simonian 'Profession de foi' through to the writings of the Second Empire period. In his commentaries on the seventeenth-century *querelle*, he rebuked Boileau for his indifference to science, industry, and the mechanical arts, while lavishing praise on 'la famille des Perrault' for having been 'accessibles à tous les goûts, à toutes les vues modernes, de science, d'art, d'inventions de toutes sortes' (accessible to all tastes, to all modern views, in the field of science, art, inventions of all kinds).[13] There were, of course, qualifications. In his remarks on Duvéyrier's lectures on 'La Civilisation et la démocratie française', he took issue with Duvéyrier's equation of civilization with modernity, pointing out, in a long disquisition on the history of the word *civilisation*, that ancient Greece and Rome not only had civilization but also had the concept of one. He also warned against directing the Promethean impulse into a hubristic worship of Man that could all too easily bring its own nemesis; whatever a 'faith' might look like in a modernist world-view, material progress alone could not be its sufficient condition. But, when all was said and done, modernization was unambiguously identified as a force of emancipation. The conquests of science and industry opened up an ever-expanding sphere of knowledge, prosperity, and power, linked moreover,

[11] *NL* vii. 50–1.

[12] Wolf Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 94. He probably has in mind the following Beuvian remark: 'Gardons-nous de l'ironie en jugeant. De toutes les dispositions de l'esprit, l'ironie est la moins intelligente' (Let us beware of irony when making judgements. Of all the dispositions of the mind, irony is the least intelligent) (*Mes poisons* (Paris, 1926), 121).

[13] *NL* i. 301.

in the Duvéyrier piece and elsewhere, to other kinds of conquest, most notably those of French imperial expansion.

This was the side of Sainte-Beuve by and large comfortably at home in the project of modernity, understood not only as a gain in material civilization but also as an addition to 'culture' (his rebuke to Boileau is for the latter's failure to grasp not only the practical value of the sciences, but also their importance to 'la culture de l'esprit'). But in nearly all other respects, the relation of culture and modernity was to prove obdurately problematical. If the relativities of history taught Sainte-Beuve that we are obliged to anchor ourselves in the options offered by the present, there was always the question as to which, if any, of the options actually provided any kind of anchorage at all. The conservative in Sainte-Beuve sought an answer in what he came to understand as 'civilization' and 'culture'. At a time when the meaning of the two terms had started to diverge,[14] Sainte-Beuve held to the assumption of their unbreakable unity, principally in the convergence of the two terms on the values of civility, taste, and tradition. Here the task was not so much to advance on the high seas of science and industry, as to consolidate and contain, precisely, to 'conserve' a legacy from the past. This is what the dyke was designed to secure in the pursuit of a 'politique de conservation'. But what was the dyke itself to be built on, what were or were to be its 'foundations' and hence the justifying grounds of what Sainte-Beuve sought to conserve? Here we glimpse the other, more anxiety-laden face of the modern conservative; indeed, it is in this zone of anxiety that the very meaning of a distinctively modern form of conservative thought is to be found.

In 'Les Regrets' Sainte-Beuve demands allegiance to a form of government that will provide 'l'ordre et les garanties de la civilisation' (the order and guarantees of civilization).[15] Ordinarily this is not phrasing to which we would feel inclined to pay much attention. The term 'order', so common in both the later Beuvian lexicon and post-1848 political discourse generally, seems instantly devalued by the occasion of its use here (the menacingly imperious call to the disaffected to rally to the regime installed by the *coup d'état*). By the same token, we may all too easily pass over the collocationary term *garanties*. Taken out of its distasteful local context, however, the term will appear far weightier. The signatories or agents of the guarantee were to be the elite corps of rulers and intellectuals. But what was the character of the 'guarantee' itself, of which these strong individuals were the guarantors? This was the capital question. If Sainte-Beuve was not a reactionary, neither was he the

[14] See Michael Werner, 'La Place relative du champ littéraire dans les cultures nationales', in Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (eds.), *Philologiques III. Qu'est-ce qu'une littérature nationale? Approches pour une théorie interculturelle du champ littéraire* (Paris, 1994), 16–17.

[15] *CL* vi. 411.

traditional conservative who believed that polity and culture grew naturally and spontaneously from the 'soil' of history. To many this appeared solid enough (and, in certain moods, did so to Sainte-Beuve himself), but he also knew that its solidity could not resist for long sustained interrogative pressure. Of all the counterfactuals one might bring to Sainte-Beuve's career, perhaps the most compelling is that the question-title of the 1850 essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' would in due course have been accompanied by another: 'Qu'est-ce que la culture?'. But if there is no text with this title, implicitly this is the question Sainte-Beuve never ceased to ponder. Since the values that adhered to the term 'culture' (taste, good sense, health, and so on) came increasingly to be taken for granted as a *sine qua non*, it is, at first sight, unclear how this could have been a question for Sainte-Beuve at all, at least in any wracking way. Yet the one thing the modernist in him could not do was claim that the values and institutions underlying the thing called 'culture' were transcendentally or naturally given.

Sainte-Beuve, like many of his European contemporaries, repeatedly stressed that culture was not nature, but a man-made construction, an 'invention', whose durability was matched by its fragility. Consider, for example, the following passage from 'De la question des théâtres':

> La civilisation, la *vie,* sachons-le bien, est chose apprise et inventée, perfectionnée à la sueur du front de bien des générations, et à l'aide d'une succession d'hommes de génie, suivis eux-mêmes et assistés d'une infinité d'hommes de goût … Les hommes, après quelques années de paix, oublient trop cette vérité; ils arrivent à croire que la culture est chose innée, qu'elle est pour l'homme la même chose que la nature. Avons-nous besoin d'être encore avertis? La sauvagerie est toujours là à deux pas; et, dès qu'on lâche pied, elle recommence.
>
> Let us acknowledge it frankly, civilization, *life*, is something learnt and invented, perfected with the sweat of many generations and with the help of a successsion of men of genius, followed and assisted by an infinity of men of taste … Mankind, after several years of peace, forget this truth all too easily; they come to believe that culture is innate, that it is identical with nature. Do we have to be reminded of this yet again? Savagery is but within a couple of paces of us; and, from the moment one yields, it starts over again.[16]

This was a view to which he would revert, particularly—and significantly—in the late article on the political writings of Constant:

> Si l'on avait à discuter, il y aurait à démontrer par les faits et par l'expérience que l'homme n'est pas si essentiellement raisonnable, que la société n'est pas une œuvre si naturelle, si facile, et où tout marche nécessairement de soi, qu'elle a été une création

[16] *CL* i. 38.

plus artificielle que ne l'imaginent des publicistes trop confiants, et que ce qui a été si pénible à construire et à élever n'est sans doute pas si simple à entretenir.

Were it to be a topic of discussion, we would need to demonstrate with the evidence of facts and experience that man is not essentially reasonable, that society is not so natural a production, so easily made, in which everything works automatically, that it has been a more artificial creation than our more confident publicity agents imagine, and that what has been so difficult to construct and build up is not that simple to maintain.[17]

These moments are an exemplary statement of a view of culture and society that was to become deeply embedded in an important variant of the nineteenth-century conservative imagination. The striking feature of this form of conservative thought is what it shares with its enemies: a consciousness of the frailty of foundations. Only a conservatism sunk in a deep catatonic sleep could, in modern conditions, posit culture as nature. Sainte-Beuve's thinking is not like this at all. If culture is fragile, this is not solely due to the menace of powerful barbarians at the gate. It is frail by virtue of the fact that it is not naturally given but artificially made; it rests on conventions and, as with all conventionalist views, is shadowed by the spectre of the arbitrary. Here we find the principal dilemma of the modern conservative, brought to a recognition of the contingent origins of culture and impelled for that very reason to work even more desperately at shoring it up. The tension generates the paradox whereby it is precisely *because* the codes are arbitrary, and thus challengeable, that they must be defended at all costs. Staring into the abyss in which the dyke is revealed as having no basis in nature, Sainte-Beuve can only urge us to dig deeper. The absence of foundation to culture demands an even more determined action to protect us from the potential, even incipient anarchy of a world without foundations. Society may be a matter of 'conventions', but these conventions are 'fundamental', and blessed are those such as Vauvenargues who 'pose comme devoir et comme règle le respect aux conventions fondamentales de la société, aux lois (même imparfaites)' (pose as both a duty and a rule respect for the basic conventions of society, for the laws (even when imperfect)).[18] It may be that the official story of its origins is fictive, but, without these fictions, the compacts that they hold together are at risk of falling apart.

Theoretically, Sainte-Beuve's anti-foundationalism could be seen as placing him in strange company. For example, his early (and in some ways abiding) allegiance to the sceptical temper of the *Idéologues* might suggest an affinity with the anti-foundationalists of the Enlightenment, directing the spotlight of critical reason onto the 'arbitrary' origins of human institutions in a manner

[17] *NL* i. 413. [18] *CL* iii. 130–1.

designed to show how such institutions could be unmade and remade, ideally by a more creative and rigorous deployment of reason itself. There was indeed an inveterate sceptic in Sainte-Beuve,[19] but the objects of his sceptical attention were less the grounds of traditional authority than the utopian schemes of those—supremely the Jacobins—who sought to reorder society on the basis of rational first principles. 'Reason' as a virtue in Sainte-Beuve was essentially the customary rationality favoured by the conservative outlook, its identification with the accumulated wisdom of *bon sens*, rather than the foundational rationality of the modern systems-builder intent on forging an axiomatic or calculus of political transformation and social construction.[20] The task was to create a world that was reasonably 'habitable' and then to 'conserve' it (these, we recall, were the terms of his dream of a modern 'state-literature'[21]). Sainte-Beuve certainly understood the power of sceptical enquiry to undermine the basis of everything, but feared the exposure of social institutions to its corrosive force, especially when conjoined with the destructive work of revolution.[22]

This had been one of the lamentable outcomes of the French Revolution ('la plus terrible des Révolutions qui a remis les fondements de la société à nu' (the most terrible of Revolutions which had once more lain bare the foundations of society')).[23] Far better to cast a discreet—or, where necessary,

[19] The subtitle of Michel Crépu's study is *Portrait d'un sceptique*.

[20] A more accurate representation of Sainte-Beuve's position may be via his gloss on Pasquier's attempts in the sixteenth century to mediate between law-based (specifically Roman law) and custom-based theories of government: 'En Droit, comme en toute chose, Pasquier suit ce grand chemin de raison qui ne donne dans aucun extrême … En un mot, il tient le milieu entre les purs *romanistes* et l'école *coutumière*, subordonnant le tout au contrôle du *sens commun*, qui est en définitive la règle suprême' (In matters of Law, as in everything else, Pasquier follows the royal road of reason which avoids all extremes … In a word, he holds to the middle ground between the our *Romanists* and the *customary* school, subordinating everything to *common sense*, which is finally the supreme rule) (*CL* iii. 268). The attack on rationalist abstraction was to gather pace in right-wing circles as the century unfolded, with particular vehemence in the writings of Taine and Bourget and then later Maurras (see Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième république des lettres* (Paris, 1983), 287, 299). Paul Nelles has interestingly situated the origins of Sainte-Beuve's 'literary scepticism' in the tracing of a genealogy for his own critical method in a pre-Enlightenment tradition of thought that was expressly designed to sever the enterprise of criticism from a model of systematically rational first principles ('Renaissance and Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 61/3 (2000), 473–92).

[21] It would both exploit and celebrate 'les mérites de ceux qui, à toutes les époques, ont servi le monde en le rendant habitable d'abord, en le conservant ensuite' (the merits of those who, in all epochs, have served the world in first rendering it habitable and in subsequently preserving it) (*Pr.L.* iii. 58).

[22] Lepenies also notes Sainte-Beuve's stress on the artificiality, and thus fragility, of the foundations of 'human society', but reads this on Sainte-Beuve's chosen terrain, as that which (unlike a natural 'organism') is unavailable to inspection rather than as something repressed and concealed (*Sainte-Beuve*, 172).

[23] *NL* iii. 76.

censoring—veil over this nakedness. Sainte-Beuve cites approvingly Rivarol's recommendation: 'Législateurs, fondateurs d'un nouvel ordre des choses, vous voulez faire marcher devant vous cette métaphysique que les anciens législateurs ont toujours eu la sagesse de cacher dans les fondements de leurs édifices' (Legislators, founders of a new order, you want to follow in the footsteps of that metaphysic which the ancient law-makers were always wise enough to hide in the foundations of their edifices).[24] What Rivarol proposed, Napoleon I enacted, repairing the fabric of the body politic after the ravages inflicted in the name of Reason by the revolutionary wreckers, through the admirable expedient of concealing from view the questionable foundations of legitimacy: 'un de ces hommes puissants et rares qui comprennent à fond la nature des choses … et réinventent, à vrai dire, la société en en cachant de nouveau la base' (one of those powerful and rare men who understand thoroughly the nature of things … and truly reinvent society by hiding once more its basis).[25] The virtues of clothing the naked was also the lesson that, in his Liège lectures on Chateaubriand, Sainte-Beuve carried over to the experience of 1848:

> aujourd'hui que les conditions de la société ont été remises en question, et que les fondements de l'édifice ont été de nouveau exposés à nu, il est beau et consolant toujours de voir replacer la pierre de l'autel, quand elle est replacée d'une main ferme avec modération et sagesse, et quand la foi des peuples ébranlée, mais subsistante, n'a pas cessé encore de s'y rattacher.
>
> given that today the conditions of social life have once again been put in question and the foundations of the edifice once more stripped bare, it is always a fine and consoling sight to see the altar stone replaced, when it is replaced with moderation and wisdom by a firm hand and when the faith of peoples, shaken but intact, has not yet been severed from it.[26]

The Burkean[27] echoes of this encomium to concealment or 'forgetting' (a form of argument later resurrected by Renan in connection with the origins of the 'nation') imply a quite different intellectual lineage for Sainte-Beuve's anti-foundationalism—less the Enlightenment than the tradition of Machiavelli and Pascal. Machiavelli famously rejected both theological and natural law theories of the origins of the polity (in the words of Emmanuel Terray, 'the

[24] *CL* v. 74.

[25] *CL* i. 139. But he was also aware of how this tactic of concealment could be opportunistically exploited (*CL* xi. 174).

[26] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 275–6.

[27] Sainte-Beuve refers to Burke only in passing, but in terms that show he thought highly of him. In the article on Mallet du Pan, Burke is listed as one of a handful of truly important writers on the French Revolution (*CL* iv. 471–2). In an article on André Chénier, he criticizes Chénier for having been 'unjust' to Burke (*CL* iv. 158–9).

renunciation of the double guarantee—divine and natural—that Machiavelli had declared illusory').[28] The state is the artificial creation of the will of the Prince, who stands outside the law in founding and maintaining the state but only because the existence of the state is the precondition of legality. Pascal shares with Machiavelli the view that power is not sanctioned by divine or natural law. There is no providential injunction or natural sociability on which to base the polity. The just is subordinated to the strong; power originates in an act of arbitrary violence, the subsequent legitimation of which requires that this violent origin be masked or 'forgotten'. The reign of justice is thus co-extensive with the reign of just-ification (the rationalization of force as that which conduces to the common good).[29] Suitably adjusted, a combination of Machiavelli and Pascal would have yielded a perfect formula for the *coup d'état*. The mix was certainly music to Sainte-Beuve's ears. Both Machiavelli and, if only in parentheses, Pascal make an appearance in his account of Montesquieu's 'mistake':

A côté de Montesquieu, j'ai voulu lire du Machiavel; c'en est la vraie réfutation. Avec Machiavel, on est toujours plus voisin de la corruption naturelle, de la cupidité première; Machiavel se méfie, et Montesquieu ne se méfie pas. C'est Machiavel qui a dit qu'il y a toujours dans les hommes une disposition vicieuse cachée, qui n'attend que l'occasion que pour sortir, et qu'il faut toutes les lois civiles, armées de la force, pour réprimer … Machiavel est très-persuadé que les hommes ont beau avoir l'air de changer pendant des durées de régime, qu'au fond ils ne changent pas, et que, certaines occasions se reproduisant, on les retrouve absolument les mêmes. Montesquieu n'est pas assez convaincu de cette vérité.

Alongside Montesquieu, I was minded to read some Machiavelli; it is the true refutation of the former. With Machiavelli, we are always much closer to man's natural corruption, his original cupidity; Machiavelli mistrusts, Montesquieu does not. It is Machiavelli who said that there is always in men a hidden vicious tendency that awaits but the occasion to re-erupt and that to repress it what is required is the whole panoply of civil laws, backed by force … Machiavelli is fully persuaded that, although men appear to change over the time span of different regimes, deep down they do not change, and, when the opportunity is reproduced, they are to be found exactly the same. Montesquieu was not sufficiently convinced of this truth.[30]

[28] Emmanuel Terray, 'Law versus Politics', *New Left Review*, 22 (July–Aug. 2003), 76.

[29] Ibid. 77–8.

[30] *CL* vii. 67. In his private diaries he was less inclined to restrain himself on the subject of human nature: 'L'humanité, sauf quelques exceptions, est toujours et partout la même, mauvaise, grossière ou gâtée. Mais chacun croit que cela n'a commencé que du moment qu'il l'a découvert, et l'on se flatte qu'il y aura moyen dans l'avenir de la ramener à un meilleur état, lequel n'a jamais existé. C'est une pure illusion d'optique de la part du spectateur' (Apart from a few exceptions, mankind is always and everywhere the same, bad, coarse, or spoiled. But everyone thinks that

The explanation of this blind spot in Montesquieu's vision of human nature and the way of the world lies in what his own historical moment failed to deliver—the experience of revolution:

> Montesquieu accorde trop non-seulement en dehors, mais en secret et dans sa propre pensée, au décorum de la nature humaine … Il oublia ce qu'avaient su et ce qu'avait eu à faire Richelieu ou Louis XIV au début. Il aurait eu besoin, je répète, d'une révolution (ne fût-ce que d'une Fronde comme en vit Pascal) pour lui rafraîchir l'idée de la réalité humaine, cette idée qui se recouvre si aisément durant les temps calmes et civilisés.
>
> Montesquieu accords, not only outwardly but secretly, at the very heart of his thought, far too much to the decorousness of human nature … He forgot what Richelieu and, at the beginning, Louis XIV knew and had to do. He would, I repeat, have needed a revolution (were it but a Fronde of the kind Pascal witnessed) to refresh his notion of human nature, the notion that is so easily clouded during calm and civilized times.[31]

By virtue of this historical lacuna, while its insights are many and wise, Montesquieu's thought remains fatally incomplete: 'Mais, au milieu de tout ce qu'a prévu et deviné Montesquieu, il y a une chose qui lui a manqué pour être tout à fait lui-même et pour achever l'éducation de son génie: il lui a manqué d'avoir vu une révolution' (But, in the midst of everything that Montesquieu predicted and divined, there is one thing he lacked in order to be fully himself and to complete the education of his genius: what he lacked was the spectacle of revolution).[32]

What Montesquieu would have learned from revolution was a chilling lesson in the realities of human nature, falsifying his belief in its essentially 'decorous' character (his 'hommage rendu … à l'élévation et à l'idéalisation de la nature humaine' (homage rendered … to an elevated and idealized version of human nature)[33]). More specifically, he would have understood that the savagery that is always close to the surface is not only a fact but *the* fact. He would have learned what Sainte-Beuve claimed to have learnt from reading Thiers's history of the French Revolution: that the Revolution was 'une de ces crises où ce sauvage, qu'elle [la société] porte toujours en son sein, se relève avec audace, et se montre tout prêt à l'accabler' (one of those crises where this savage, which it [society] always carries in its breast, audaciously revives and reveals itself ready to overwhelm it).[34] In

these qualities have appeared only at the moment of their own discovery of them, and flatter themselves with the belief that there is a way in the future of restoring man to a better state, a state which has never existed. It is a pure optical illusion on the part of the observer) (*Mes poisons*, 134).

[31] *CL* vii. 68.

[32] *CL* vii. 66–7. On Montesquieu and human nature, see Cecil Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford, 1963), 14–15.

[33] *CL* vii. 51–2. [34] *CL* i. 139.

other words, there is a foundation after all, in the negative form of a theory of Human Nature. Prior to culture and polity there is a 'force' tending to anarchy unless met by the counter-force of the State (the view he expressed in one of his letters during the carnage of the June days[35]). The appeal to the notion of a destructive or corrupted human nature was, of course, a classically conservative move, the intellectual sources of which for Sainte-Beuve included, along with Machiavelli, principally the seventeenth-century writers Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and Molière (reading La Rochefoucauld in particular seems to have been decisive in Sainte-Beuve's turn to radical moral pessimism).[36]

[35] See Ch. 2.

[36] See Michel Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 227–8. The intellectual nexus linking La Rochefoucauld and Machiavelli is also a theme of the article on Naudé: 'La politique n'est que l'art de mener les gens, et cet art dépend de l'idée qu'on se fait d'eux. La Rochefoucauld donne la main à Machiavel' (Politics is but the art of leading people, and this art depends on what idea one forms of them. La Rochefoucauld goes hand in hand with Machiavelli) (*PL* 684). Machiavelli's political thought was mobilized during the Second Empire as a means of legitimizing Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état*. Giuseppe Ferrari's *Histoire de la raison d'État* was published in 1860 and, amongst other things, seems to have nourished Baudelaire's (unrealized) project for a study of Condorcet and Machiavelli, in which the latter's recipes for the seizure and maintenance of power were to be favourably contrasted with Condorcet's notions of rational perfectibility, the contrast in turn resting on Baudelaire's view of 'la perversité primordiale de l'homme' (see Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, *Baudelaire* (Paris, 1996), 414, and Pierre Pachet, *Le premier venu: Essai sur la politique baudelairienne* (Paris, 1976), 34, 43). Baudelaire may well have found sustenance for this contrast in Sainte-Beuve's *Lundis* (although Sainte-Beuve himself nowhere mentions Ferrari). It is also intriguing to speculate what, if anything, Sainte-Beuve knew of Maurice Joly's *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* (Baudelaire was acquainted with it), first published as a pamphlet in 1864 and for which Joly was arrested by Louis-Napoleon's police and imprisoned for fifteen months. It is unlikely that Sainte-Beuve did in fact read it, but, if he did, his silence on Joly's pamphlet is doubtless to be explained by Joly's very different views. The *Dialogue* was a satire on the *coup d'état* with a deeper theme running through it: how, in the modern world of 'democratic' rule, autocratic domination is best secured by means of demagogic manipulation of the masses. Machiavelli is accorded the villain's role, as providing the rationale for the techniques of autocracy, whereas Montesquieu's ideas, under attack from the cynical Machiavellian calculus, are the ones by which modern polities should actually be guided. This, of course, was the exact opposite of Sainte-Beuve's prescriptions. There is moreover a further and altogether more dramatic irony here, or rather a set of ironies pregnant with historical catastrophes to come. Joly's pamphlet was extensively plagiarized by the Russian forgers of the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Where Joly had pointed his satirical finger at Louis-Napoleon, the forgers both de-satirized Joly's arguments and displaced them onto the Jews, as the alleged record of a grand Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination (there are, of course, no Jews in Joly's text). But in a further cruel turn of the screw, not only did the forgers adapt Joly's criticism of the imperial regime to the ends of anti-Semitism, they also took from Joly's descriptions of the techniques of demagoguery a set of formulae for a plan of world domination of their own; even as they used Joly to denounce the 'Jewish conspiracy', they found in it what they saw as necessary to their own purposes or, in Konrad Heiden's words, found themselves 'confronted with their own image' (*The Führer* (Edison, NJ, 2002), 15). By means of a lethal appropriation, they themselves absorbed what they claimed to expose. How any of this might plausibly stand to Sainte-Beuve's defence of Machiavelli is anyone's guess, where the guesses may turn out to be disreputably speculative. But, given the enthusiasm for

'Cette triste humanité comme une vieille enfant et une incurable' (The sad spectacle of mankind, like an aged child and an incurable invalid) is how he put it in his article on Molière;[37] 'un habile chimiste' (a skilful chemist), alchemizing egoism into the self-deceiving appearance of altruism, was the image he took from La Rochefoucauld; and from his reading of Pascal a view of the *Pensées* as a 'mirror' in which we could contemplate the 'abîme' of our natures:

> Creusez en vous-même, étudiez et sondez votre duplicité, plongez en tous sens au fond de l'abîme de votre cœur, et vous n'y trouverez pas autre chose que ce que Pascal vous a rendu en des traits si énergiques et si saillaints. La théologie de l'auteur des *Pensées* … porte en plein sur la nature morale de l'homme.
>
> Dig deep into yourself, study and fathom your duplicity, plunge from all sides deep into the abyss of your heart, you will find nothing other than what Pascal provided with such energetic and salient brushstrokes. The theology of the author of the *Pensées* … bears fully on the moral nature of man.[38]

It was furthermore no accident that—yet again—the scene of revolution provided the cardinal demonstration of the natural baseness of man. The delusion of the revolutionaries—Sainte-Beuve's main examples are Sieyès and Condorcet—was their belief in natural reasonableness, coupled with a utopian projection of mankind's rational perfectibility: 'Refaire le cœur humain à neuf, telle est la prétention exorbitante de cette école finale du XVIIIe siècle, issue de l'*Encyclopédie*, et dont Condorcet, je l'ai dit, est le produit extrême et comme le cerveau monstrueux' (To remake the human heart anew, that was the exorbitant aspiration of this school at the end of the eighteenth century, issuing from the *Encyclopédie* and of which, as I have already said, Condorcet is the extreme product and, as it were, the monstrous brain).[39] The 'monstrousness' of Condorcet consisted not just in 'l'application indiscrète et outrée des méthodes mathématiques transportées dans les sciences sociales et morales' (the wanton and extravagant application of mathematical methods transferred to the social and moral sciences) ('orgies de rationalisme' is his stronger term[40]), but also in the paradox whereby the

Sainte-Beuve of that anti-Semitic ideologue of Action française, Charles Maurras, there is here, at the very least, food for disturbing thought (see Ch. 11). On the resurrection of Machiavelli in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique: XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris, 1986). Lefort, however, concentrates on Ferrari's earlier work of 1849, *Machiavel, juge des révolutions*, which mounted the ingenious argument that there was a historical 'logic' according to which the *coup d'état* was the unwitting instrument of the uncompleted revolution of 1789.

[37] *PL* 354. [38] *PL* 1043. [39] *CL* iii. 347.

[40] *CL* iii. 358–9. While Sainte-Beuve considered Sieyès to be a much superior political thinker, he nevertheless took a similar view of Sieyès's principal 'error': 'Son erreur à lui,

insistence on the perfectibility of human nature itself contributed to regression and the unleashing of the savage 'monster' within. As he put it in connection with some observations of Mme de Staël on the French Revolution: 'On avait oublié tout à fait que sous l'homme, même le plus civilisé, on atteint vite le sauvage. Aussi, quand sonna l'heure de la révolution de '89, tout le monde y donna, tête baissée, dès le premier jour' (It had been completely forgotten that if you scratch the surface of man, even at his most civilized, you quickly reach the savage. Thus, when the hour of the '89 revolution struck, everyone plunged in head first, from the very first hour).[41]

Strong government was one remedy or safeguard, one form of the dyke. The other was 'culture', in the sense of 'culture de l'esprit', culture as the production of the cultivated mind specified in the article on Perrault. The expression 'culture de l'esprit' is also used in the early pages of *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, in connection with one of Mme de Staël's more 'beautiful ideas'—namely, the idea of culture as a 'counterweight' to the exacerbation of man's 'natural' tendency to brutality and violence by the reign of modern 'democratic' ideas (where 'democracy' is here a cognate of revolution): 'une idée très-belle qui revient sous mille formes et qui en est comme l'âme, à savoir le besoin et l'urgence, dans le règne des idées démocratiques, de maintenir, de relever d'autant plus la culture de l'esprit, pour faire contre-poids à la brutalité et à la violence qui est la pente naturelle' (a most fine idea, which takes a thousand forms and is, so to speak, their soul, that is, the urgent need, in the reign of democratic ideas, to maintain, to revive all the more the cultured mind as a counterweight to the brutality and the violence which is our natural bent).[42]

This is about as open as it gets in Sainte-Beuve, a view of the function of that fragile 'invention', culture, as a stratagem for the policing of human nature. It has echoes in many places in the later nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. For example, in *Theophrastus Such*, George Eliot quotes, in slightly wobbly translation, the passage from 'De la question des théâtres', glossing it as follows: 'We have been severely enough taught (if we are willing to learn) that our civilization, considered as a splendid material fabric, is helplessly in peril

comme celle de presque tous les solitaires, si puissants qu'ils soient, est de croire qu'une réformation radicale est possible, et que le genre humain, ne fût-ce que dans son élite, peut obéir une fois pour toutes à la raison … Il a complètement erré en croyant que la raison pouvait s'enseigner en masse aux hommes et devenir la loi des sociétés à venir' (His own mistake, as of almost all solitaries, however powerful they may be, is to believe that a radical reformation is possible and that humankind, if only in its elite, can be placed under the rule of reason for all time … He was utterly mistaken in believing that reason could be taught to the mass of men and become the law of societies of the future) (*CL* v. 198, 203).

[41] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 49. [42] Ibid. i. 74.

without the spiritual police of sentiments or ideal feelings. And it is this invisible police we had need, as a community, strive to maintain in efficient force.'[43] The passage from Sainte-Beuve is clearly adduced as the underpinning of this exhortation, but the stress in the passage itself on the invented character of 'civilization' produces the question that was also to exercise Eliot: who or what authorizes the 'spiritual police'? It cannot be nature (the enemy of culture), nor, to a scientifically minded generation, could it be religion.

When, to his Liège audience, Sainte-Beuve affirmed that part of the charm of re-reading *Le Génie du christianisme* in today's conditions was the consoling formula it supplied for re-erecting the 'pierre d'autel' (the altar stone) on the ruined social landscape stripped 'naked' by the events of 1848, the figure of the altar stone was not meant to be taken literally. He was not duped by Chateaubriand's showily aesthetic version of Christianity, the antidote to which was the far more austere faith of Port-Royal. His interest in the latter, however, was as a human and moral phenomenon rather than as the site of a body of formal religious doctrine. Similarly, his admiration for Bossuet the writer did not entail an endorsement of Bossuet's theology of divine right. In the article on Richelieu he toyed with it on pragmatic grounds, as a useful fiction in ensuring the ordered state,[44] but, when it came to the nineteenth-century efforts to resurrect it by thinkers such as Bonald, Sainte-Beuve was openly scornful. His review of Bonald is scrupulously judicious in presenting Bonald on his own terms (one of the meanings of criticism as doing 'justice'), but the terms themselves are also described as inflexibly doctrinaire and wholly out of tune with the times. By the same token, his far greater respect for de Maistre's quirky historical thinking did not extend to the latter's theocratic prescriptions. On the more 'progressive' wing, he flirted briefly with the messianic enthusiasms of Saint-Simonism ('l'inspiration religieuse s'était mêlée à l'industrie et à la science, pour les unir et les féconder' (religious inspiration had fused with industry and science with a view to unifying and fertilizing them)[45]), but its proposed fusion of the sacred and the secular was not a prospectus that detained him for long. Lamennais's efforts to ground the

[43] George Eliot, 'Debasing the Moral Currency', in *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (London, 1995), 80.

[44] *CL* vii. 236. See also the remarks on Bossuet's providentialism in the article on Guizot: 'Bosssuet a l'habitude, dans ses vues, d'introduire la Providence, ou plutôt il ne l'introduit pas: elle règne chez lui d'une manière continue et souveraine. J'admire cette inspiration religieuse chez le grand évêque; mais, en pratique, elle l'a amené au droit divin et à la politique sacrée' (Bossuet habitually introduces Providence into his views, or rather he doesn't introduce it; it governs his thought in a continuous and sovereign manner. I admire the religious inspiration of this great bishop; but in practice it led to divine right and sacralized politics) (*CL* i. 327–8).

[45] *Pr.L.* iii. 362. Lepenies notes Sainte-Beuve's preoccupation with harmonizing science, religion, and modern industrial society (*Sainte-Beuve*, 54). He also invites us to take seriously Barrès's claim that the Beuvian soul 'était portée vers la religion' (was drawn to religion) (p. 272).

social programmes and democratic liberties of modernity in an enlightened version of Catholicism fascinated him, but Lamennais's incendiary rhetoric came to repel him as altogether excessively shocking.

A great deal of attention has been devoted to the question of Sainte-Beuve and 'religion', but, apart from informing us about some of the vaguer dispositions and yearnings of the Beuvian soul, it is attention largely misplaced. Sainte-Beuve wanted to 'believe' in something that would arrest and guide the 'tourbillon' of the modern world,[46] but he made no great exertions to find it in religious faith. About the best he could muster was a typical compromise formation, diluting the intractable contradictions of faith and science, materialism and spirit, into an ecumenical pot-pourri, a blend of ingredients in which each would 'balance' the other: we would be wise to read Pascal as a corrective check to the élan of a triumphalist modernity while staying faithful to the latter's 'project' ('Il est bon qu'il y ait quelque part contre-poids' (it is a good thing to have a counterweight somewhere) ).[47] This is a lame version of Sainte-Beuve's ideal of 'measure', and certainly has little in common with the anguished challenge of the *Pensées*. The central dilemma of the modern conservative thus remains in place, and is perhaps best represented by returning once more to the comparison with Matthew Arnold: 'Human thought, which made all institutions, inevitably saps them, resting only in that which is absolute and eternal.'[48] Raymond Williams identified this moment in the essay 'Democracy' as the disabling crux of Arnold's use of the term 'culture'. The 'desperate grasp' at the notion of an absolute was a way of making culture 'a substitute for religion … while appearing to resemble an absolute, it has in fact no absolute ground'.[49]

Sainte-Beuve often appears to occupy a similar position: he too feared the power of thought to 'sap' institutions (these are the terms of his own criticism of Voltaire[50]), and clung to the belief that 'culture' might take the place of religion as modernity's guiding Absolute. Amongst other things,

It was not, other than in the weakest sense of the term 'religion', as a vague set of longings undisciplined by anything remotely resembling faith. Barrès himself was perfectly aware of this.

[46] *NL* vii. 49. [47] *CL* v. 537.

[48] Matthew Arnold, 'Democracy', in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Trilling, 469. The search for foundations—'grounds'—to culture was explicitly one of the programmatic aims of *Culture and Anarchy*: 'I shall seek to find some plain grounds on which a faith in culture—both my own faith in it, and the faith of others—may rest securely' (*Culture and Anarchy*, in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Trilling, p. 471). Just how 'plain' and 'securely' anchored these 'grounds' were to prove is, of course, another matter. For Arnold they crucially involved elevating the State above the play of private interests in modern commercial society, but also the suppression of working-class rebelliousness (the 'Hyde Park rough'). Sainte-Beuve would have been of help here, given the importance he attached to both the State and the containment of insurrection.

[49] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London, 1968), 134–5. [50] *CL* xiii. 3.

this would explain his attempt to formulate a literary criticism that would bypass entirely the influence of the Enlightenment.[51] Yet the anxiety regarding 'foundations' survived the various attempts to repress and displace it. Irving Babbitt (that other arch-conservative) has some interestingly astute remarks on the foundational issue in Sainte-Beuve. In two widely separated moments of his commentary, he draws attention to two utterly different models of foundation in Sainte-Beuve's criticism. One was strictly methodological and quintessentially modern: the adaptation of 'science' to literary study (where 'scientific' meant primarily historical method and philological technique): 'Though his attitude towards literature is not primarily scientific, he satisfied the strictest standards in his scrupulosity as to facts. The gracefulness of the superstructure in his essays is equalled by the solidity of the foundations.'[52] But whatever the methodological virtues of science, it was unable to provide a 'spiritual' foundation. This had to be an 'Absolute' ('a world of absolute values'). But the relativist in Sainte-Beuve could never believe in this, and, just as for Arnold, 'culture' came to serve as its substitute. The substitution, however, was essentially 'aesthetic' in inspiration: 'Let us repeat that Sainte-Beuve's hold on tradition and the sense of unity that goes with it was mainly aesthetic, and therefore comparatively ineffective … He has indeed been correctly defined in his influence as a great doctor of relativity.'[53]

Sainte-Beuve looked for this self-supporting aesthetic ground in the coherence of the seventeenth century and the classical ideal. The classical, he maintained in 'De la tradition', denotes a culture at ease with itself, unself-consciously at one with its age. Another way of putting this would be to say that its assurance derived from not looking too closely into its own origins (it was, of course, in many respects a fantasized seventeenth century, telling us that, with Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, Sainte-Beuve did not go all the way into the seventeenth-century version of the abyss). The nineteenth century, however, was, on Sainte-Beuve's own diagnosis, constitutionally incapable of reproducing that self-assurance. It was self-consciousness incarnate. This could be dressed in the romantic language of emotion, rêverie, and sensibility, but in fact was the historical offspring of Enlightenment scepticism, one of whose major consequences for the nineteenth century was the feeling of having been cut away from the 'ground', alienated, adrift, or what, also in 'De la tradition', Sainte-Beuve termed the 'wandering' spirit of the moderns.

Sainte-Beuve wanted to inhabit a world in which to have a thought was a contemplative rather than a disturbing experience. The literary past furnished an image of that possibility. His own time, all movement, shifting and

[51] See above, n. 20.
[52] Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston, 1940), 131
[53] Ibid. 149–50.

disintegration, seemed to embody a denial of the possibility. It was the other Arnold, Thomas rather than Matthew, who caught the implication, when, in his review of Mill's *On Liberty*, he claimed that what the modern age demanded was not a 'constant meditation' on received truths but a 'constant discussion of the grounds'.[54] This is what Sainte-Beuve did not want. In 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' Sainte-Beuve spoke of 'calm' and 'repose', an end to the restlessness of the modern wanderer that was to be obtained and enjoyed by both the reading of the classics and critical reflection on them. It was not just an existential preference; it was also a cultural project in which the purpose of a judicial criticism was to bring a certain stability to judgement. This was to be the central aim of the 'politique de conservation'. It was far from being a purely individual matter (Sainte-Beuve retiring to his armchair to savour old books and fine Burgundies). It was to be the work of a 'group'.

One of Sainte-Beuve's answers to the question of foundations was communitarian in form. The ground would be not merely secured but actively created by the endeavours of an institutionalized community of writers, critics, and intellectuals. This might be the way to build the 'dyke' and provide the 'guarantee'. The *fondation* (in the institutional sense) would be the social material with which to engineer the *fondement*.[55] He came to call this community a *diocèse*.[56] The ecclesiastical term, however, was provocative (doubtless intentionally), since it was used by Sainte-Beuve in his 1867 address to the Senate to defend freedom of thought in the universities, and in particular Renan's nomination to the Collège de France (Sainte-Beuve's was thus a community of free thinkers, beholden only to their own intellectual independence). But the argument underlying this otherwise admirable intervention contained an implicit drawback: a community of free thinkers was necessarily dispersive rather than centralizing in its cultural effects; its members were, by the logic of the argument, wandering spirits rather than organizing centres.

The speech to the Senate was in part a description of the present and in part a glance at the future. It was to these temporalities that the 'politique de conservation' was addressed. But in practice it represented more and more a turning to the past, an emphasis on the uses of the past for the present. This produced a quandary for Sainte-Beuve, a disjunction between criticism and its objects. Judicial criticism was to be an educational enterprise whose objective was to lay down a basis for sound 'judgement', in the first instance

[54] Quoted in Philip Davis, 'Unsaying', *London Review of Books*, 15 April 2004, 32.

[55] 'A un ordre social nouveau, il faut des fondations nouvelles et qui en reçoivent l'esprit' (A new social order requires new foundations imprinted with its spirit) (*Pr.L.* iii. 64). In French the term *fondations* can carry both the institutional and the engineering senses.

[56] *Pr.L.* iii. 281–2.

for a contemporary public (the readers of the newspapers in which the *Lundis* appeared), but, secondly, for posterity.[57] The category of the 'classic' was central to this grand design, but principally in the form of a backwards look to the past. The question then was how to take the reflection on the classic further and forwards, by thinking through—for posterity—not only the terms of a modern discourse on the classic, but also the conditions of possibility of a 'modern' classic itself. For the larger ambitions informing the conserving enterprise involved the dream of reforming the literary institution as well as the reading public; the exercise of right 'judgement' was to be a matter for writers as well as for readers and critics.

Here the example of Perrault's role in the *querelle* might have sprung to the assistance of the modernist in Sainte-Beuve,[58] but in fact would have been of little help. Perrault, the arch-Modern, was a spokesman for a modernity that included both modern science and modern literature as the twin components of a fable of progress. Although Perrault himself does not use the word *classique* (the normative meanings of its seventeenth-century usage being irrelevant to Perrault's concerns), it would not be implausible to construe his positioning of modern literature as the rival of, or even superior to, the ancient kind as an attempt to formulate a theory of the modern classic. Perrault's brashly modernist self-confidence was not, however, something Sainte-Beuve could have shared, for at least three reasons: his respect for the past, his distinctively nineteenth-century sense of historical and cultural relativities, and his generally adverse assessment of the quality of nineteenth-century literature. Yet the question of what a modern literature ideally might be or become was written into the theoretical fabric of his relativist outlook. What, then, were the chances or, more importantly, the 'grounds' for a revival of the culture of the classic, where 'revival' was to be taken in its full sense of the living?

[57] See Lepenies, *Sainte-Beuve*, 444.

[58] Charles Perrault … a été de son temps un homme à idées neuves … tourné vers l'avenir, confiant au génie moderne … à voir les résultants croissants de la civilisation dans les arts et dans les industries, on peut dire que Perrault triomphe' (Charles Perrault … was in his time a man of new ideas … turned towards the future, confident in the genius of modernity … going by the growing results of civilization in the arts and in industry, we can say that Perrault triumphs) (*CL* v. 255).

# 10

# The Modern Classic

## I

The usefulness for Sainte-Beuve of the peculiar analogy that he occasionally drew between the critic and the doctor[1] lay primarily in justifying an approach to the literature of his own time, the critical arts directed to taking the pulse and temperature of a century suspected of running a fever bordering at times on delirium. At his most alert, this resulted in a probing cultural diagnostics where the Goethean distinction between the 'healthy' and the 'sick' in the account of the classic came out as a determined effort to discriminate the authentic and the fake, the true note and the speciously induced, or what, in a stronger idiom, he called the charlatanesque (as we shall see, these concerns were to press heavily on the intractably problematic case of Chateaubriand).[2] Rounding up the charlatans in turn motivates the related analogical representation, Sainte-Beuve as the latter-day equivalent of Boileau in the role of comptroller-general of Parnassus, an inspector of accounts or central banker monitoring and exposing the circulation of counterfeit currency. But, if the Beuvian stethoscope and magnifying glass proved to be refined instruments of detection when applied to the fevers of the body and the debasement of the currency,[3] their value was often impaired by serious defects in the listening and viewing capacities of their user, especially when, in his travels from past to present, Sainte-Beuve was brought face to face with the question—was there, could there be, such a thing as the 'modern classic'?

[1] See Ch. 9. On the other hand, however peculiar these analogies may seem to us, the 'medicalizing' of all manner of discourses was a general feature of nineteenth-century intellectual life.

[2] 'Dans ce XIXe siècle, qui sera réputé en grande partie le siècle du charlatanisme littéraire … et où il est généralement à qui fera le plus valoir sa marchandise' (In this nineteenth century which will in large measure acquire the reputation of the century of literary charlatanism … and where it is, generally speaking, a question of who most promotes the value of their merchandise) (*NL* v. 253). For Sainte-Beuve the true charlatan was Victor Hugo.

[3] Recall that the chapter in *Theophrastus Such* where George Eliot cites Sainte-Beuve on the fragility of 'culture' is called 'Debasing the Moral Currency'.

One answer that he gave was a guarded affirmative: 'l'idée qui reste d'un classique, après l'avoir entendu, n'est plus du tout celle d'un mort ou d'un demi-dieu refroidi. Et nous autres modernes, peut-on se dire, nous sommes du bois dont on fera peut-être un jour des classiques: il ne s'agit que de le mériter' (what, after having understood it, remains of the idea of a classic is not at all that of a corpse or some frozen demi-god. And of us moderns, perhaps one might say that we are of the stuff from which perhaps one day classics might be made; all that is required is to merit it).[4] This is Sainte-Beuve in unusually sanguine mood, but at the same time wary enough to attach the—in itself unexceptionable—proviso of 'merit'. In practice, however, the criteria of 'merit' he came to use were such that he managed to bungle comprehensively the question he himself had raised. In a nutshell, how was it that Sainte-Beuve, when considering the literary landscape of his own age, arrived at the truly remarkable view that Ernest Feydeau's *Fanny* was to be preferred to Constant's *Adolphe*,[5] could be lavishly praised in print even as he remained silent on Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*,[6] and interestingly contrasted with Flaubert's *Salammbô*?[7] If there were such a thing as a modern classic, how could Feydeau's bauble be deemed to fit the bill more persuasively than, say, the novels of Flaubert?

'De la tradition' developed for its original student audience the case for respecting and transmitting the past, a role for which the academic institution was ideally suited. At the same time, in assuming the professorial function, Sainte-Beuve also reminded his students of the somewhat different task of the critic: 'le critique s'inquiétant avant tout … de chercher le nouveau et de découvrir le talent, le professeur de maintenir la tradition et de préserver le goût' (the critic is concerned above all … with seeking out the new and discovering talent, the professor with maintaining the tradition and preserving taste).[8] He also implied that the lines demarcating this division of labour might cross at certain points. One such point was the connection of the past—the 'tradition'—to the present and the future. The tradition was an object to be preserved but also to be renewed: 'Pour maintenir la tradition … il convient … de la rajeunir même, et de la tenir dans un rapport perpétuel avec ce qui est vivant' (In order to maintain the tradition … one should actually … rejuvenate it and keep it in a perpetual relation with the living).[9] In this endeavour, the nature of his audience matters: the youthfulness of his student listeners makes of even the academic setting a place where the critic might finally usurp the professor, encouraging the gaze to be turned as much to the future as to the past: 'vous m'habituerez à me tourner plus souvent et

[4] *NL* xii. 9. [5] *CL* xiv. 167–75. [6] *CL* xv. 346.
[7] *NL* iv. 93. [8] *CL* xv. 356. [9] *CL* xv. 373.

plus volontiers avec vous du côté de l'avenir, vous me rapprendrez à espérer' (you will accustom me to turn with you more often and more willingly towards the future, you will teach me again how to hope).[10]

The object of this hope crucially implicated the fortunes of the idea of the classic. Sainte-Beuve frequently linked the classic to what itself was the classical doctrine of *renovatio*, most notably in the sequence of articles on Du Bellay with their account of the latter's thought and work as 'classique dans toute la force du terme' (classic in the full force of the term), by which he meant a practice of 'grafts' and 'transplants' from old to new, whereby 'on imite avec liberté, chaleur, émulation, non qu'on traduise' (one imitates in a spirit of freedom, warmth, emulation, one does not translate).[11] According to the guiding definition of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', the true classic is at once 'nouveau et ancien, contemporain de tous les âges' (new and old, contemporary with all ages).[12] Underlying this view were two arguments, two agencies of renewal. The first derives from the transhistorical temporalities of reception that make of the classic a permanent contemporary ('contemporain de tous les âges'). Once established as a classic, it remains a 'living' entity by virtue of being open to endless reinterpretation through successive acts of reading. The primary example given in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' is Goethe's rereading of Molière ('Molière est si grand, disait Goethe (ce roi de la critique), qu'il nous étonne de nouveau chaque fois que nous le lisons' (Molière is so great, Goethe (that king of critics) said, that he surprises us anew every time we read him)[13]), a principle generalized in 'De la tradition' when Sainte-Beuve specifies the duty of 'la transmission des belles-lettres classiques' (the transmission of the classics of fine writing) as the charge 'de les interpréter continuellement à chaque génération nouvelle de la jeunesse' (of continually interpreting them for each new generation of the young).[14] The second—close in spirit to the positions of Stendhal, Baudelaire, and Proust[15]—was internal to the classic work itself and its initial moment of production: before it becomes a classic, it is not perceived as such; in its newness, it disturbs and shocks ('ceux qui dérangent et choquent'), whereas the 'false' classic merely reproduces what is given to it by the past.

Part of the point of discriminating the functions of the professor and the critic in 'De la tradition' was to rerun a version of this formula in order, if only in passing, to draw the attention of his students away from the past

[10] *CL* xv. 382. [11] *NL* xiii. 284, 305. [12] *CL* iii. 42.
[13] *CL* iii. 42. [14] *CL* xv. 357.
[15] 'Je crois que tout art véritable est classique, mais les lois de l'esprit permettent rarement qu'il soit, à son apparition, reconnu pour tel' (I believe that all true art is classical, but the laws of the mind rarely permit that it is recognized as such at the moment of its appearance) (Proust, 'Classicisme et romantisme', in Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1971), 617).

towards the contemporary. The professor is the curator of the tradition, who preserves the dead rather than helps 'faire naître' the new. The critic, on the other hand, is a mix of the midwife, the 'sentinelle' on the 'qui vive' (this time not as a sentry standing guard against the invasion of the barbarians, but actively on the look-out for what lies on the horizon of present and future), and the pilot who guides the ship to shore. Even the professor 'ne peut pas entièrement échapper à la connaissance des choses nouvelles, des arrivées et des approches pompeusement annoncées, des voiles qu'on signale de temps en temps à l'horizon comme des armadas invincibles' (cannot entirely sidestep knowledge of the new, of what, announced with pomp, comes into port, the ships one espies from time to time on the horizon like so many invincible armadas). Yet scanning the horizon for the arriving vessels raised another 'delicate' question, or rather made visible another face of the delicate question of the classic as such posed in the opening moment of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'. It was the problem of unripe time, of the premature: 'Ici nous touchons à une question assez délicate; car il ne s'agit pas de venir introduire dans l'enseignement des noms trop nouveaux, de juger hors de propos des ouvrages du jour, de confondre les fonctions et les rôles' (Here we touch on a rather delicate issue; for it is not a question of bringing very recent names into the teaching arena, of making out-of-place judgements on works of the day, of confusing functions and roles).[16] The problem was partly context-driven, by the stress on the divided labour of teacher and critic required by the pedagogical nature of the occasion. But it was also a restatement of the principle sketched in more openly Stendhalian terms in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?': 'Il n'est pas bon de paraître trop vite et d'emblée classique à ses contemporains; on a grande chance alors de ne pas rester tel pour la postérité' (It is not a good thing to appear too rapidly, from the outset, as a classic before one's contemporaries; there is a real risk of not remaining such for posterity).[17]

The impossibility of second-guessing the future was thus, in addition to being something best kept out of the classroom, also a way of bracketing the future itself; the classics of posterity are a matter for posterity. But, if the fate of the classic tomorrow lies beyond our legitimate reach, what of yesterday and today? What of the recently arrived vessels, as distinct from those still out at sea? One of the notable features of early nineteenth-century thinking about the classic was the narrowing of the temporal gap between yesterday and today. Already in 1801 Marie-Joseph Chénier, in his *Observations sur le projet d'un nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française et sur le Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, claimed Rousseau for membership in the family of the French

[16] *CL* xv. 372–4. [17] *CL* iii. 49.

classics.[18] In 1808 Amar-Durivier, in his *Cours complet de rhétorique*, identified Delille and Chateaubriand as 'noms devenus classiques parmi nous, des noms que nos jeunes gens doivent s'habituer à respecter' (names that have become classics amongst us, names that our young people must become accustomed to respecting).[19] Sainte-Beuve referred twice to Amar, first as one of the early nineteenth-century 'erudite' commentators on Boileau and subsequently in the article on Delille, where he noted Amar's comparison of Delille with the painter Vernet (one of Sainte-Beuve's own favourites).[20] Might it then have been a memory of Amar's inclusion of Chateaubriand in the canon of the classic that inspired the impromptu remark, most of which is confined to a footnote, in connection with the relation of the 'tradition' to the Graeco-Roman legacy: 'l'héritage de ces maîtres et de ces pères illustres, héritage qui, depuis Homère jusqu'au dernier des classiques d'hier (s'il y a eu hier un classique)' (the legacy of those masters and illustrious forebears who, from Homer to the latest of yesterday's classics (if yesterday there has been a classic)). The footnote clarifies what Sainte-Beuve here has in mind: 'Et pourquoi pas? Ce dernier des classiques pour nous a été Chateaubriand' (And why not? The most recent of those classics for us was Chateaubriand).[21] If Andrieux (Chateaubriand's insignificant contemporary) can be given a place, then 'why not' indeed Chateaubriand himself?

That the remarks on the existence of a near-contemporary classic in 'De la tradition' are offered both parenthetically and in the conditional form ('s'il y a eu hier un classique'), with their further elaboration then consigned to a footnote, may well stem merely from the fact that such speculations were tangential to Sainte-Beuve's principal concern in this essay with the more distant literary past. But it may also reflect an uncertainty as to the validity of the claim itself, notwithstanding the throwaway nonchalance of the phrase 'pourquoi pas?' For Sainte-Beuve, Chateaubriand was by far the most plausible candidate for instantiation of the idea of a modern classic. On the other hand, Chateaubriand was the nineteenth-century writer about whom Sainte-Beuve could never quite make up his mind, returning to him time and again, as an open question held in a series of ever hesitant and shifting valuations. Chateaubriand presented Sainte-Beuve with what was probably the most

[18] Quoted in Jean Hytier, 'The Classicism of the Classics', *Yale French Studies*, 38 (1967), 6–7. Rousseau is also included in the family of the world's classics in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'.

[19] Quoted in Pierre Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques* (Paris, 1952), 7.

[20] *PL* 6, 408.

[21] *CL* xv. 358. On the other hand, Chateaubriand is not included in the list of the classics in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'.

challenging critical assignment he ever gave himself.[22] Here was the person Sainte-Beuve defined as the greatest of the modern French writers and yet whose greatness he could never bring clearly into focus, his adulation undermined at almost every turn by the gnawing suspicion that behind the *éclat* lay a conjuring trick and that the triumphal literary coronation was as bogus as the crowning of Napoleon. Moreover, the ambivalence about Chateaubriand pointed to more than Sainte-Beuve's difficulty in deciding the ultimate status of an individual author. If Chateaubriand was something of a conundrum, this was because his work, even as it transcended them, also embodied the qualities of an age that were in so many ways the mortal enemy of what Sainte-Beuve understood as the spirit of the classic. Making up his mind about Chateaubriand was therefore tantamount to making up his mind about the conditions for the survival of the classic in the nineteenth century.

The conditions were not propitious, less from the force of the prematurity argument than from the dispiriting sense of belatedness. It was not because it was too early to tell which nineteenth-century writers would become the classics of the future, but because the nature of nineteenth-century literary culture in general meant that it was probably too late for the idea of the classic to thrive and prosper (notwithstanding the pious hopes invested in turning, with his students, 'vers l'avenir' in terms of a threadbare fantasia about the cultural resources of the Second Empire). This is why the example of Perrault was of no use to him. Perrault's 'idée très-philosophique' (according to which 'il n'y a pas de raison pour que la nature ne crée pas aujourd'hui d'aussi grands hommes qu'autrefois, et qu'il y a place, dans sa fertilité inépuisable, à un éternel renouvellement des talents' (there is no reason why nature should not produce today as many great men as previously and for there to be room, in her inexhaustible fertility, for an eternal renewal of talents)[23]) was of limited serviceabilty for the decisive reason that the nineteenth century was not the seventeenth century. The problem of the nineteenth century was not that it was a scene of the new but that, in hyperinflating the category of the new, it had fallen victim to a sickness (to which Sainte-Beuve variously gave the names individualism, anarchy, egoism, etc.). Psychologically and culturally as well as economically, the New had been hijacked by the nineteenth-century marketplace, in its lack of cohesion proliferating the 'bizarre', the 'excessive',

[22] Michel Crépu claims (from the alleged fact that the entry for 'Chateaubriand' in the index to the *Causeries du lundi* is by far the longest) that 'Chateaubriand est, de loin, l'écrivain dont Sainte-Beuve s'est le plus occupé' (Chateaubriand is by far the writer with whom Sainte-Beuve was the most preoccupied) (*Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 51). Crépu, however, seems to have miscounted. The winner is Voltaire, closely followed by Napoleon I.

[23] *CL* v. 266.

the 'monstrous', along with a radical failure to distinguish the boundary between the genuine and the meretricious.

The basic story Sainte-Beuve has to tell about the nineteenth century is that of a promise betrayed or rather a promise that could never have been honoured in the first place, bearing within it from the word go the seeds of decline and dissolution. In retrospect, the buoyantly optimistic moment of promise was the roughly fifteen-year period from the Consulate to the end of the First Empire, a time of post-revolutionary consolidation, in which literature and criticism joined with philosophy and politics as a collective enterprise that, while it could never have rivalled the productive coherence of the *grand siècle*, was the closest the nineteenth century was to get to being its equivalent. Sainte-Beuve's unit of analysis and description was the 'group' (carried over into the title of the major study of the period, *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire*). There were five such groups: the figures gathered around Chateaubriand (Fontanes, Joubert, Chenedollé), the Coppet circle of Mme de Staël (Constant, Sismondi, Barante), the Auteuil *Idéologues* (Tracy, Cabanis, Ginguené, Fauriel, Pariset, Thurot), the journalist-critics of the former *Journal des débats* who subsequently allied themselves with their colleagues at the *Journal de l'Empire* (Geoffroy, Feletz, Dussault) and, finally, the scholars of the Institut and the Académie française (Collin d'Harville, Andrieux, Picard, Daru), whose informal *déjeuners dominicaux* organized by Daru were situated by Sainte-Beuve as a mediator ('la voie du milieu') between those associated with Fontanes (effectively the 'official' critic of the Empire[24]) and the more 'republican' *Idéologues*. Notwithstanding the tensions with, and even outright opposition to, the Emperor in some of these quarters, the whole was held together under the firm but inspiring rule of Napoleon I, himself described as a writer of some distinction, whose works could be compared with the *Œuvres de Louis XIV*.[25]

Sainte-Beuve's remarks on the First Empire as the embodiment of the might-have-beens of history began in the 1830s with the articles on Fontanes and Joubert and continued into the 1850s with the articles on Feletz and Daru. Fontanes, like Fauriel, represented the creatively transitional ('la transition et la nuance d'intervalle' (the transition and the fine point of interval)) as someone who 'entrait dans la meilleure part du nouveau siècle … à la limite du genre classique' (connected with the best of the new century … at the limit of the classical genre).[26] His strength of purpose was not just a matter

[24] In a telling analogy, Sainte-Beuve compares Fontanes to Cardinal Duperron presenting Malherbe to Henri IV (*PL* 546).

[25] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 32–4. On the mediating influence of Daru and his group, see *CL* ix. 453.

[26] *PL* 490–1.

of individual will; it was also a reflection of his good fortune in finding and good sense in exploiting a real 'concert' and 'collaboration' between critic and public, such that the former, as '*secrétaire* du public', was as much a barometer as a shaper of opinion.[27] Although by 1850 the memory was already a distant and nostalgia-laden one, there was still the hope—Sainte-Beuve's personal hope on assuming his new post as *lundiste* with *Le Constitutionnel*—that this happy union might be recreated: 'La tradition nous a entretenus maintes fois des beaux jours de la critique littéraire à cette époque du Consulat et de l'Empire; on regrette ce règne brillant de la critique, on voudrait le voir renaître sous une forme qui convient à nos temps' (The tradition has often kept us abreast of those happy times for literary criticism during the period of the Consulate and Empire; we miss the glittering reign of this body of criticism and would like to see it reborn in a form suitable to our own time).[28] But by the time of the articles on Daru (1854), the hope is beginning to fade, with nostalgia curdling to sour lament:

> Il y avait, et parmi les auteurs et parmi le public, comme un sentiment de religion littéraire. Depuis, là comme ailleurs, le respect s'est perdu; on a plus loué, et moins estimé ou considéré; on a eu des veines et des accès d'idolâtrie, moins de religion. L'industrie s'en est mêlée, l'homme de lettres, même le plus glorieux, est devenu vendeur comme un autre.
>
> There was, among both authors and public, a sentiment resembling a kind of literary religion. Since then, there as well as elsewhere, respect has disappeared; praise has been preferred to esteem or consideration; there have been currents and bursts of idolatry, and less religion. Industry has got involved, the man of letters, even the most glorious, has become a seller like everyone else.[29]

These, however, are but the grouses of the critic who already some fifteen years previously had complained of the onset of old age for both himself and his century. What sets this jeremiad in a profounder level of cultural analysis is Sainte-Beuve's acknowledgement that his view of the period of the First Empire may have been an idealizing one, and that the fable of decline was not to be restricted to what came after, like some fall from original grace, but was written into the moment of origins itself. He had already hinted at this perspective in the 1838 article on Joubert. Here Sainte-Beuve draws the standard contrast between then and now: 'En un mot, ce ne sont en littérature aujourd'hui que vocations factices, inquiètes et surexcitées, qui usurpent et font loi … Au temps de M. Joubert, il n'en était pas encore ainsi' (In a word, literature today is but a scene of factitious, anxious, and over-excited vocations, usurpers establishing themselves as authorities … In M. Joubert's time it was not yet

[27] *CL* i. 473. [28] *CL* i. 372. [29] *CL* ix. 441.

like this). But he then adds: 'Déjà sans doute les choses se gâtaient' (Doubtless things were already deteriorating).[30] The invisible worm is already at work in the apple of the new Eden. This was to become one of the central arguments of the magisterial *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire*, initially composed as lectures in 1849 and published in book form in 1861.

In the first of the lectures Sainte-Beuve invited his audience into the space of a thought-experiment: imagine the time of the Consulate and First Empire as 'une époque ancienne'. But this would be to mummify it ('l'on ne fait que de l'histoire morte' (one does but dead history)). The purpose of Sainte-Beuve's backward glance is to capture, for his contemporaries, a link with contemporaneity, to seize 'l'esprit vivant de la tradition … et d'aller à ce qui a influé, à ce qui compte' (the living spirit of tradition … and to go towards what has been influential, to what counts).[31] The shift from perfect to present tense inscribes the project of historical enquiry in the urgencies of the Now. What, from this point of view, does he find and place before his listeners in Liège? In a first emphasis, a time of 'renaissance': '1802 marqua une ère nouvelle; il y eut renaissance, retour à l'antique esprit ou du moins à de nobles formes de la tradition, en même temps que reprise du mouvement littéraire extrême du dernier siècle' (1802 marked a new era; there was a renaissance, a return to the antique spirit or at least to the noble forms of the tradition, while at the same time a reprise of the extreme literary movement of the last century). But there is already a snag in this account of recovery and renewal: 'La décadence fut de nouveau voilée. En un mot l'automne continua, mais il y eut un air de reprise du printemps' (Decadence was yet again concealed, in a word the autumn continued under the appearance of a return of spring). The energies of this apparent spring have long since died in the wastes of the mid-nineteenth-century winter: 'On peut dire avec certitude que le mouvement littéraire ouvert en 1800 par Chateaubriand et par Mme de Staël, continué depuis par d'autres presque aussi glorieux, est entièrement épuisé aujourd'hui' (It can be stated with certainty that the literary movement inaugurated in 1800 by Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël, and continued since by less illustrious names, is today wholly exhausted).[32] However, it was anyway but a false spring masking the shadows of autumn. The hindsight view teaches us to prefer lucidity to nostalgia and see the period for what it truly was, the first chapter in a saga of *déclinisme*: 'nous ne sommes pas en 1800 à l'aurore d'un grand siècle, mais seulement au début de la plus brillante des périodes de déclin' (in 1800 we are not at the dawn of a great century, but merely at the beginning of the most glittering of periods of decline).[33] Whatever possibilities it seemed to

[30] *PL* 559. [31] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 43.
[32] Ibid. i. 31–2. [33] Ibid. i. 194.

announce, the rebirth was doomed in advance to the abortive by the array of historical forces not only ranged against it but installed within it, as a kind of primordial and incurable genetic defect before which the ministrations of the doctor-critic were of no avail.

## II

At the heart of this diagnosis stand the ambiguities of Sainte-Beuve's assessment of Chateaubriand. If one condition of a literary renaissance was the integrating work of the 'group', the other was the appearance of the lodestar 'genius' (in the sphere of politics, the great leader, Napoleon, in the sphere of literature, the great writer, Chateaubriand), a view moreover shared by Chateaubriand himself, his famous opposition to Napoleon in large measure the disguised index of rivalry for the *beau rôle* on the public stage. If, as Sainte-Beuve maintains, the first half of the nineteenth century can be divided up into three 'periods', each of roughly fifteen years, Chateaubriand, 'le plus grand et le plus signalé des personnages littéraires qui parurent à l'entrée du siècle' (the greatest, the most outstanding of the literary personages who made their appearance at the beginning of the century), straddles them all by virtue of a power of consistency and durability:

> Eh bien, il y a un homme qui a eu le privilège de durer et de persister, disons mieux, de régner durant les trois périodes … Il y a là une destinée littéraire et plus que littéraire, une destinée vraiment historique et monumentale, à laquelle se rattache de loin aux yeux de la postérité toute une période accomplie … M. de Chateaubriand est et demeurera en perspective le premier, le plus grand des *lettrés français* de son âge.
>
> Well, there is a man endowed with the privilege of enduring and persisting, or, to put it better, of reigning across the three periods … We find here a literary destiny, indeed more than just literary, a truly historical and monumental destiny, to which, in the eyes of a distant posterity, a fully accomplished period is attached … M. de Chateaubriand is and will always be perceived as the first, the greatest of the *French men of letters* of his age.[34]

The claim is tested counterfactually: suppose he had died in 1792 (Chateaubriand himself informs us in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* that he came close),

[34] Ibid. i. 44–5. The judgement is repeated much later in the book, in terms moreover that emphasize the continuing presence of 'classical' qualities in modern writing: 'La tradition moderne se serait établie par lui, et par lui se serait nouée à l'ancienne; classique à la fois et romantique, lui seul avait crédit et caractère pour cela' (The modern tradition is allegedly established by him, and through him linked to the older tradition; at once classical and romantic, he alone had the accreditation and the character for this) (ii. 431).

what would the consequences have been for the history of modern French literature:

> Quelle direction, quelle impulsion puissante aurait fait faute, et comme un seul anneau brisé aurait changé la suite et la direction de la tradition littéraire, telle qu'elle s'offre à nous aujourd'hui!—Eh, Messieurs, on parle toujours, comme d'une force fatale et comme d'une cause souveraine, de *l'esprit du siècle*, de *l'esprit du temps*: cet esprit du temps à chaque époque, il faut bien le savoir, n'est qu'un effet et un produit. Ce sont quelques hommes supérieurs qui le font et le refont sans cesse en grande partie et qui le déterminent.
>
> Which direction, which powerful current would have been wanting and, like a single broken ring, would have changed the sequence and direction of the literary tradition as it comes to us today! Well, gentlemen, we talk today, as if of a fatal force and a sovereign cause, of *the spirit of the century*, of *the spirit of the time*: this spirit of the time, it must be understood, is in every epoch but an effect and an outcome. It is a handful of superior men who, for the most part, ceaselesly make and remake it, who determine it.[35]

Chateaubriand was one of these, the blazing meteor streaking across the firmament of the early nineteenth century. But at another level Sainte-Beuve suspected that the sparks were merely fireworks, all display without enduring substance. There are two ways of mapping the inner core of doubt and disenchantment in Sainte-Beuve's view of Chateaubriand, chronological and structural. On the first axis, we have the suite of articles that begins in 1834 and ends in 1865 and that describes a move from awe-struck wonder to a growing scepticism that modulates finally into the overtly caustic. In the first of these pieces, Chateaubriand is the creative innovator, 'un de ces écrivains qui maintiennent une langue en osant la remuer et la rajeunir. Toute l'école moderne émane plus ou moins directement de lui' (one of those writers who maintain a language while daring to stir and rejuvenate it. The whole of the modern school emanates more or less directly from him).[36] But it is the modern school tempered at the outset by the disciplines of the literary past; if Chateaubriand is the modern writer most eligible for canonization as a 'classic', this is in no small part because of his fidelity to a 'classical' tradition: 'M. de Chateaubriand est venu, remonant à la phrase sévère, à la forme cadencée du pur Louis XIV … un fonds de droit sens mêlé même au faste, de la mesure et de la proportion dans la grandeur' (M. de Chateaubriand came along, returning to the severe form of the sentence, the cadenced form of the Louis XIV style in its purest guise … a stock of good sense blended even with the ostentatious, measure and proportion mixed with splendour).[37] By 1850 (during which, in the immediate aftermath of the Liège lectures,

[35] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 139–40. [36] *PC* i. 14. [37] *PC* i. 13.

Sainte-Beuve devotes no less than three of the *Lundis* to Chateaubriand), this euphoric judgement has been substantially modified. Chateaubriand remains 'le premier écrivain d'imagination qui ouvre le XIXè siècle; à ce titre, il reste jusqu'ici le plus original de ceux qui ont suivi, et, je le crois, le plus grand' (the first imaginative writer who inaugurates the nineteenth century; in this capacity, he remains up till now the most original of those who came after, and, I believe, the greatest). But the door he opened for the nineteenth century is now a double one, through which arrive both the vices and the virtues of modern literature: 'C'est de lui que viennent comme de leur source les beautés et les défauts que nous retrouvons partout autour de nous, et chez ceux que nous aimons le plus: il a ouvert la double porte par où sont entrés en foule les bons et les mauvais songes' (He is, as it were, the source of the beauties and defects that are to be found everywhere around us, including in those we like the most: he opened the double doors through which have poured our good and bad dreams).[38]

The approach strives to be even-handed, but the tone also sharpens, especially in connection with the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (the text immediately under review). The latter discloses 'une opiniâtre personnalité' (a stubborn personality), a self-portrait in which 'il se donne toujours à lui-même le beau rôle … Partout se révèle et perce un amour-propre puéril' (he always assumes the glamorous role … everywhere a puerile self-regard breaks through and discloses itself), such that our pleasures of reading are impaired by 'ou une imagination bizarre et sans goût, ou une énorme et puérile vanité' (either a bizarre and tasteless imagination or a vast and puerile vanity).[39] Chateaubriand is first and foremost an 'actor', the nature, meaning, and value of whose performance remain obscure ('Est-ce un acteur encore en scène … ?' (Is this an actor still on stage?)).[40] In the follow-up piece (delayed until later in 1850), this holds also for the character of Chateaubriand's most renowned creation, René, reflected in the (by Chateaubriand) unexamined propensity of his hero to conceal behind a cover of world-weariness 'une certaine rage satanique' (a certain Satanic rage) animated by a ferocious will to destruction, a devouring of the world by ego. René's *tedium vitae* is also replete with bad

[38] *CL* i. 452.

[39] *CL* i. 434, 438, 442, 450. The specific criticism of the *Mémoires* is that of superimposing the false emotions of retrospect on the original impressions being recorded ('ceux qu'il avait réellement au moment qu'il raconte' (those he really had at the moment of recounting them) (i. 447). See also the remark on the two editions of the *Mémoires*: 'Combien le premier récit, malgré les incontestables beautés du second, reste plus pur, plus net, plus vrai, sans aucune surcharge, et tout à fait classique!' (How much the first narrative, despite the incontestable beauties of the second, remains purer, clearer, truer, without overload, and wholly classical!) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 369).

[40] *CL* i. 443.

faith, never more demanding of the attention of others than when turning away from others. Like his creator, René's posture is an act, to which the world is called as witness even as the world is rejected ('Il fait de tout … matière à apothéose' (he converts everything into material for apotheosis) ).[41] In short, the theme of unmastered vainglory, staging non-self as but a mirror for self, emerges as a severe constraint on continuing accolade. Chateaubriand as man of affairs, player on the scene of political life (the focus of the last of the 1850 articles)? For the most part, posturing vanity and vengeful malice.[42] In 1854 it is the arguments of *Le Génie du christianisme* that come under the spotlight, only for Sainte-Beuve to assert that they are not 'arguments' at all, but attempts at 'seduction' (in it Chateaubriand aimed 'à émouvoir et à charmer plutôt qu'à réfuter' (to move and to charm rather than to refute)[43]), an echo perhaps of what he termed the 'faux christianisme de René'[44]) and a foretaste of what will be repeated in the final return to Chateaubriand in 1865: 'La religion de René, qui n'est que dans l'imagination et qui ne régénère pas le cœur' (René's religion, which exists only in the imagination and does not regenerate the heart).[45]

There is more to this tale, however, than a trajectory of revision, the record of an evolving attitude, from enthusiastic salute to its retraction. For, in 1865, at the end of his prolonged sojourn with the works of Chateaubriand, Sainte-Beuve also arcs back to its beginning. Even as he again takes his distance, he cannot let go. Notwithstanding its manifold defects, *Atala* is a great work ('Il y a de la grandeur dans la convulsion' ( There is greatness in convulsion)[46]). With *René* we enter Chateaubriand's 'saison toute classique' (fully classical season); in it 'la perfection est atteinte, la mesure est trouvée' (perfection is achieved, measure is found), its relentless egocentricity not the simultaneously other-obliterating and other-soliciting reflection of the self, but the 'mirror' (the analogy here is Sainte-Beuve's) in which the nineteenth-century soul sees its own reflection: 'un miroir où chacun se reconnaît et apprend, pour ainsi dire, à se nommer' (a mirror in which everyone recognizes himself and learns, so to speak, how to name himself).[47] Even Chateaubriand's own psychological infirmities have their redeeming qualities: 'Il gardait dans son égoisme naïf bien du bon encore, surtout de l'aimable, du séduisant' (He retained in his naive egoism a residue of goodness, above all something amiable, something

[41] *CL* ii. 155.

[42] In this vein Sainte-Beuve was a master of the silky put-down, the sort of thing that brought Nietzsche and others to call him 'feline': 'En général, M. de Chateaubriand est trop disposé à s'étonner de sa destinée' (In general, M. de Chateaubriand is too disposed to astonishment before his own destiny) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 397). In the *Chroniques parisiennes*, written for a Swiss readership, he was altogether less silky (see Roberto Calasso, *The Ruins of Kasch* (London, 1995), 351–3).

[43] *CL* x. 76. [44] *CL* i. 157. [45] *Pr.L.* iii. 202. [46] *Pr.L.* iii. 199.

[47] *Pr.L.* iii. 200–1.

seductive).[48] In short, if there is a temporal rhythm here, Sainte-Beuve closing one wing of the double door (onto the good dreams of the nineteenth century) as he opens wide the other (onto its bad dreams), the doubleness of his view, while varyingly inflected, remains a constant; the duality is intrinsic to, constitutive of, judgement, and the assessment made in a continuing state of hesitation and uncertainty. Sainte-Beuve tries to resolve the tension by drawing up a balance-sheet of pros and cons. But this quantitative ledger cannot satisfactorily dispel the underlying problem, which is ultimately of a qualitative nature concerning the significance of the work as a whole and its place in the culture that produced it.

The key term of this irreducible ambivalence is the adjective *séduisant*, the implications of this Janus-faced epithet most fully developed in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*. One the one hand, we have the seducer as magician or enchanter ('Ce qu'il faut dire en terminant, c'est qu'il était un grand magicien, un grand enchanteur' (What in conclusion must be said is that he was a great magician, a great enchanter)[49]); on the other hand, there is the seducer as impostor, forcing the surrender of right reason and good sense (the prime 'classical' values). From the strictly literary point of view, this hesitation centres on Chateaubriand's dubious use of the 'image':

> je voudrais qu'on pût dire du talent qu'il est un *enchanteur* toujours, et jamais un *imposteur*. Les images chez M. de Chateaubriand sont belles, éclatantes, grandioses, mais elles concourent souvent à former un groupe un peu raide et un peu factice à la manière de la peinture de l'Empire.
>
> I would like to be able to say of his talent that it was always that of an enchanter and never that of an impostor. M. de Chateaubriand's images are beautiful, stunning, grandiose, but they often conspire to form a pattern that is a little stiff and a little artificial, in the manner of Empire painting.[50]

Compared with the more 'natural', unassuming style of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand's images 'ne peuvent paraître que forcées' (can only appear forced),[51] placed on self-congratulatory exhibition awaiting the applause due to the consummate performer: in *Atala* 'M. de Chateaubriand y a réussi à ravir, de manière par moments à enchanter et à mériter qu'on applaudisse: je dis *qu'on applaudisse* à dessein, car on sent le jeu, même quand on est séduit et charmé' (In this M. de Chateaubriand has succeeded marvellously, in a manner that at times is enchanting and that fully deserves our applause: I say *applause* deliberately, for one senses the trick being played, even when one is seduced and charmed).[52] The more general conclusion is that this is a symptom of decadence rather than renewal. Chateaubriand is 'le

[48] *NL* iii. 12. [49] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 114.
[50] Ibid. i. 202. [51] Ibid. i. 208. [52] Ibid. i. 218 (emphasis in original).

premier grand artiste d'une époque de décadence … des images, toujours des images: il les veut nobles sans doute, brillantes, à effet, glorieuses, partout où il les trouve' (the first great artist of an epoch of decadence … images, always images: he doubtless intends them as noble, brilliant, used for effect, glorious, wherever he finds them).[53]

There are two contexts in particular where this indictment of the Chateaubriandesque image is mounted, the language of epic and the language of religion. The first concerns Chateaubriand's attempt to recreate the genre of epic in *Les Natchez* and *Les Martyrs*. The latter especially fails the acid test of epic 'naivety': 'C'est brillant, c'est ingénieux … mais d'où vient que cela manque de charme?' (It is brilliant, it is ingenious … but how is it that it lacks charm?).[54] It is 'du pastiche fait avec talent', housing a 'mythologie d'opéra', a simulacrum of the real thing ('cet antique refait et de troisième main' (a remake of the antique at third hand)).[55] In short, Chateaubriand's way with epic is that of a failed tour de force, endowed with splendid set pieces but unable to recover the true spirit of ancient epic. To some extent Sainte-Beuve shares Boileau's view that the epic is no longer possible in the modern age, but that is not his argument here. There are other latecomers who are at ease with epic and retain something of the unselfconscious 'naturalness' associated with the genre (both Fénelon and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre are 'à la fois naturellement antique et naturellement chrétien' (at once naturally antique and naturally Christian), though how they can manage to be 'naturally' both—or indeed either—pagan and Christian is moot).[56] With Chateaubriand the case is less historical–generic than *ad hominem* ('Mon opinion, qui n'est pas historique, mais toute littéraire' (My opinion, which is not historical but thoroughly literary)).[57] The flaw in the writing is also a flaw in the writer, and where in connection with epic this produced what was essentially a literary mistake, in connection with religion it contaminated the well of public sensibility.

Let us discount the foolish dalliance with the insignificant Feydeau as one of Sainte-Beuve's lapses with the category of the 'minor', and ask instead who seriously counted for him as the most representative nineteenth-century figures. They were Chateaubriand and Lamennais, largely because of the positions they respectively occupied on the pressing issue of the spiritual resources available to a post-Enlightenment epoch. Both men thought historically, but were also themselves historical beings, in the sense not just of men of their times but men *for* their times, nineteenth-century men for whom religion and modernity were uneasy but inseparable companions; the task to hand was how

[53] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 74. [54] Ibid. ii. 49. [55] Ibid. ii. 4–6.
[56] Ibid. ii. 6. [57] Ibid. ii. 5.

to rejoin spirituality and materiality in the age of secular democracy and thus deal with the problem of the irreversibly eroding 'foundations' to belief. For Lamennais modernity meant primarily democratic liberty, his project running along a two-way track: how to 'save' religion by making it compatible with modernity; how to redeem modernity (the egoism of democratic liberty) by providing it with an anchor in faith. Sainte-Beuve caught perfectly the passion, anguish, and anger informing Lamennais's writing (for which the later term 'social Catholicism' is an inadequate textbook cliché), although he drew the line at what he perceived as Lamennais's verbal 'incontinence'.[58]

Chateaubriand, on the other hand, sought to recreate and rediffuse the 'genius' of Christianity by means of a precocious literary spectacle designed to entrance the public imagination, a pagan–aesthetic defence of Christianity based less on doctrine than on style, on a dazzling exploitation of the poetic image. He served as Catholicism's greatest nineteenth-century ambassador because his sales talk was so irresistible: 'Il y avait en 1800 un grand rôle à prendre d'*avocat poétique* du Christianisme' (1800 offered the space for adopting the role of *poetic advocate* for Christianity).[59] The timeliness of Chateaubriand lay in assuming that role, in contrast, for example, to Bonald, whose dry abstractions were more intellectually rigorous but entirely without appeal:

> Le livre en lui-même n'est sans doute pas un grand livre ni un vrai monument [the comparison here is with Pascal's *Pensées*] … Mais ce que cette œuvre fut véritablement, nous le voyons déjà: ce fut un coup soudain, un coup de théâtre et d'autel, une machine merveilleuse et prompte au moment décisive et faisant fonction d'auxiliaire dans une restauration sociale d'où nous datons.
>
> In itself the book is probably not a great book nor a true monument … But the reality of this work is something we can already see: it was a bold stroke, a theatrical bid on behalf of the altar, a marvellous machine adapted to the decisive moment and having an auxiliary function in the social restoration from which our own time dates.[60]

The 'magic' of Chateaubriand served the worthy purpose of re-enchanting the disenchanted world.

Yet acting as the persuasive magician to modern democratic civilization had its downside. The suave virtuosities of *Le Génie du christianisme* strayed close to being a form of insinuating demagoguery, Chateaubriand playing yet again to the gallery, not only the seducer but in turn the seduced, basking in

[58] *CL* xi. 450. [59] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 285 (emphasis in original).

[60] Ibid. i. 271. See also Sainte-Beuve's comment on Lerminier's criticism of the *Essai sur les révolutions* as everywhere displaying 'l'éclat futile de la gloriole des lettres' (the futile lustre of literary vainglory): 'pour nous qui croyons, en le lisant, que l'éclat des lettres sert de beaucoup à propager et à illustrer des vérités' (for us who believe, on reading him, that the brilliance of letters can be very useful in propagating and illustrating truths) (*Pr.L.* ii. 239).

the glow of popular acclaim. Even his friend and supporter Joubert hinted at this in a private letter that Sainte-Beuve published in his 1862 article: 'Il parle aux autres, c'est pour eux seuls et non pas pour lui-même qu'il écrit; c'est aussi leur suffrage plus que le sien qu'il ambitionne' (He speaks to others, it is only for them and not for himself that he writes; it is as a matter of fact their suffrage rather than his own that he aims for).[61] In *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire* Sainte-Beuve made more or less the same point by recalling Bonald's distinction between himself and Chateaubriand: Bonald was the *guerrier* going to doctrinal war, Chateaubriand was the 'reine qui apparaît un jour de fête, revêtue de tous ses joyaux et dans toutes ses pompes' (queen who appears at a holiday festival, wearing all her jewels and all her finery).[62] But behind the regal appearance there lurked a deformity of both soul and style. The 'pagan' colouring given to Christianity meant all too often a confusion of the carnal and the divine; what should remain hidden behind the queenly veil or the 'tapisserie magique' can suddenly unmask itself, such that what we see is a 'creux', a hollow core in which the ugliness of physical desire is revealed as the motivational undergrowth of the text: 'Il est fâcheux vraiment de savoir ainsi le secret, de voir à nu le revers de la toile … *Il y a du creux*—Et c'est ce qu'on pourrait dire presque toujours, sans crainte de se tromper, aux plus magnifiques endroits des écrivains de ce temps-ci' (It is truly tiresome to be made thus cognizant of the secret, to see the reverse side of the canvas with the naked eye … *There is a hollowness*—And this is what, without fear of error, one can nearly always say of the most splendid parts of the writers of that time).[63] This was illustrative of a more general characteristic of Chateaubriand's writing and its relation to the age in which it was produced, that 'difformité légère par où M. de Chateaubriand se rattache à certaines difformités romantiques modernes, qui ont fort grossi depuis lui, mais dont le principe et le germe se trouvent pour la première fois dans notre littérature' (slight deformity through which M. de Chateaubriand aligns himself with certain modern romantic deformities, which have greatly increased since but

[61] *NL* iii. 7. [62] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 271.

[63] Ibid. i. 307–8. There may, however, have been a flicker of uneasy self-recognition in this criticism of Chateaubriand's motives. In *Un homme libre* Maurice Barrès noted astutely in the section on Sainte-Beuve that 'Ta rêverie religieuse était pleine de jeunes femmes' (Your religious reverie was full of young women) (Maurice Barrès, *Romans et voyages*, ed. Vital Rambaud (2 vols.; Paris, 1994), i. 129). See also Sainte-Beuve's criticisms of *L'Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*: 'Il n'y a pas accord parfait,—que dis-je? Il y a un vide et un abîme entre ses buts avoués et ses buts secrets, entre son sentiment intime (indifférent) et son expression éclatante. Le côté faible, le creux de l'inspiration nous est révélé' (There is not a perfect accord—at the very least. There is a void and an abyss between his declared aims and his secret aims, between his intimate feeling (indifferent) and his brilliant expression. The weak aspect, the hollowness of inspiration, is revealed to us) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 75).

the germ and principle of which are to be found for the first time in our literature).[64]

## III

This was the outcome of Sainte-Beuve's retrospective on the period of the Consulate and the First Empire, his view of it as a false beginning that in fact announced an end. The curse of Chateaubriand, both suffered and inflicted, is that he comes, not early, as a force of inauguration, but too late. The rot has already set in, and his own work, for all its formidable qualities, contributes to its spread:

> Tel a été Chateaubriand, non pas un des véritables grands artistes des beaux siècles, non pas un des premiers ni même des seconds en beauté, mais un de ceux qui viennent immédiatement après ceux-là, et qui, en toute carrière, laisseront plus de traces d'eux-mêmes et plus de souvenirs sur cette pente de décadence, sous les regards d'une postérité qui ne saura plus bien où est le vrai beau.
>
> Such was Chateaubriand, not one of the truly great artists of the best centuries, not, in the matter of beauty, in the first rank or even the second, but one of those who comes immediately after the former, and who, throughout their whole career, will leave more traces of themselves and more memories of this downwards turn towards decadence for a posterity that will no longer know well where true beauty lies.[65]

The diagnostic symptomatology that Sainte-Beuve, in his role as doctor-critic, developed around the case of Chateaubriand was thus designed to place a more general pathology under the microscope. The collapse of faith in Chateaubriand spelt a collapse of faith in the possibility of the modern classic, the casual *pourquoi pas?* now buried beneath an enveloping shroud of doubt.

There was a hard-won perspicuity in arriving at these judgements, a work of sheer critical intelligence in recognizing and posing the question of Chateaubriand as *the* question of his age. But there were also blind spots in the account, failures of intelligence, most notoriously when it came to dealing with other nineteenth-century contemporaries. Since Proust it has been the custom to ascribe these shortcomings to personal weaknesses (envy, resentment, cowardice), although these were doubtless aggravated by what Babbitt termed Sainte-Beuve's 'morbid fear of being duped' in the century of the Charlatan.[66] These qualities are certainly relevant, but far more important

[64] Ibid. i. 304. [65] Ibid. ii. 59.
[66] Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston, 1940), 131.

was the tightening grip on Sainte-Beuve's thought of an ideology—initially rejected in the more expansive mood of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?'—within whose terms the idea of the classic was assimilated to the official 'classico-centrism' of the later nineteenth century and beyond.[67] To see just how ideological it was, we should turn back from Sainte-Beuve's preoccupation with the bankruptcy of the nineteenth century and its flagrant cult of 'self', to what got simplified in his representation of the historical model of the (French) classic itself, the *grand siècle*.

In the jottings of the *Cahier vert* Sainte-Beuve noted: 'le génie est la plus haute incarnation de la raison' (genius is the highest embodiment of reason).[68] It is one amongst many pontificating obiter dicta, but there is also something strange to the formulation: a term from the individualist vocabulary of romantic aesthetics (*génie*) is absorbed into a term from the rationalist vocabulary of the classical aesthetic.[69] And if, in the matter of genius, reason is all, this is in part because of that other semi-private declaration in *Mes poisons*: 'Je suis classique en ce sens qu'il y a un degré de déraison, de folie, de ridicule, ou de mauvais goût qui suffit pour me gâter à tout jamais un ouvrage' (I am classical in the sense that there is a degree of folly, madness, absurdity, or bad taste that suffices to ruin a work for me for ever).[70] Much hangs here on the nuancing reach of the term 'degree', but the two remarks taken together seem also to involve repressing from the space of the classic one dimension of what Patrick Dandrey has called 'les deux esthétiques du classicisme', not to mention the underside of *déraison*, which Michel Foucault placed at the heart of the classical moment.[71] On Dandrey's account, classicism is the site of both 'la naissance de la rationalité moderne, et … , parallèlement, du sujet individualisé' (the birth of modern rationality, and … , in parallel, of the individualized subject).[72] Descartes, of course, marks the philosophical point at which these two currents meet. But there is also an important predecessor-figure—namely, Montaigne—'le classicisme se montre l'héritier de Montaigne' (classicism reveals itself as the inheritor of Montaigne)—in that 'il constitue une étape dans l'histoire de l'individualisation des esprits et des mœurs qui s'effectue en Occident depuis le XVIe siècle' (he constitutes a

[67] See Roland Barthes, *Critique et verité* (Paris, 1966), 49.

[68] Quoted in Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques*, 213.

[69] For an interesting, if very different, account of the strategic role played by the term *génie* in Sainte-Beuve's critical writings (marking the point at which the genre of the critical 'portrait' replaces a classical aesthetic by a modernist one), see Ann Jefferson, *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford, 2002), 140 ff.

[70] *Mes poisons* (Paris, 1926), 11.

[71] Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris, 1961).

[72] Patrick Dandrey, 'Les Deux esthétiques du classicisme français', in Alain Viala (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? Littératures classiques*, 19 (Paris, 1993), 146), 149.

stage in the history of the individualizing of minds and manners in the West from the sixteenth century onwards).[73]

This was an aspect of Montaigne and his influence that troubled Sainte-Beuve, and it is interesting to consider in exactly what terms it troubled him, given the otherwise almost heroic status Sainte-Beuve accords Montaigne in the history of French literature. Montaigne is not only a classic by virtue of being, with Calvin, Rabelais, and Amyot, one of 'les quatre grands prosateurs du XVI siècle' (the four great prose writers of the sixteenth century),[74] but also because, quite simply, '(c)'est, avec Pascal et Bossuet, notre plus grand écrivain' (he is, with Pascal and Bossuet, our greatest writer).[75] He is, moreover, a 'modern' classic in the sense of being for ever our contemporary; he belongs in the company of La Fontaine and Mme de Sévigné, herself described as 'un de ces sujets qui sont perpétuellement à l'ordre du jour en France. Ce n'est pas seulement un classique, c'est une connaissance, et, mieux que cela, c'est une voisine et une amie' (one of those subjects that are permanently the order of the day in France. She is not only a classic, she is an acquaintance and, even better, a neighbour and a friend).[76] Similarly, Montaigne is one of those writers 'qui gagnent à être sans cesse relus' (who gain from being ceaselessly reread),[77] our contemporary by virtue of the inner dynamic of his own, endlessly self-renewing literary style: 'Son style est une figure perpétuelle, et à chaque pas renouvelé' (His style is a figure in perpetual flight, and renewed with every step).[78]

Why then, in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', does Sainte-Beuve equivocate his wholehearted assent to the inclusion of Montaigne in the Pantheon, describing him not as a 'classic' but as 'une espèce de classique anticipé': 'Montaigne a été une espèce de classique anticipé, de la famille d'Horace, mais qui se livrait en enfant perdu, et faute de dignes alentours, à toutes les fantaisies libertines de sa plume et de son humeur' (Montaigne was a sort of anticipatory classic, of the family of Horace, but who, as a lost child and from the lack of worthy surroundings, gave himself up to all the free-thinking fancies of his pen and his temperament).[79] Too much the 'enfant perdu', Montaigne is not fully subject to the discipline of a rationally ordered culture. One reason (the reason given in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?') is historical—the lack of a sustaining environment ('faute de dignes alentours') due to the turbulence

[73] Ibid. 157. [74] *CL* iii. 2.

[75] *Causeries sur Montaigne*, ed. François Rigolot (Paris, 2003), 61.

[76] *CL* i. 49. In the article on Stendhal, Molière is described as 'ce classique qui n'a pas vieilli' (this classic that has not aged) (*CL* ix. 319). Pascal is similarly described as 'notre contemporain par le sentiment' (our contemporary in feeling) (*CL* v. 536).

[77] *CL* xiv. 282. [78] *Port-Royal* (Paris, 1953), 863. [79] *CL* iii. 49.

of civil disorder in sixteenth-century France.[80] But there was another reason, which comes to the fore in the strenuous confrontation between Pascal and Montaigne in *Port-Royal*, the rehearsal of the competing claims of scepticism and faith, pagan acceptance of the natural and its ascetic renunciation.[81] If there is a place in Sainte-Beuve's œuvre where he offers something resembling a spiritual testament, this is it. The staging of the two outlooks is 'judicious' in the best sense, even if the outcomes are to some extent predetermined by the framework of discussion (Pascal's introduction of the *Essais* to the Port-Royal circle). But on one point the victory laurels are handed to Pascal. For the Port-Royal circle, the problem of Montaigne was his cultivation of the earthly *moi*. Sainte-Beuve's complaint is similar, though it centres on an aftermath by definition unavailable to Pascal and his colleagues: the delayed influence of Montaigne on the post-Rousseau generation: 'Depuis Montaigne renouvelé par Rousseau, ce n'a été que confessions de gens avides de *se découvrir, affamés de se faire connaître*' (Ever since the renewal of Montaigne by Rousseau, it has been a question only of the confessions of people desperate *to reveal themselves, hungering to make themselves known*).[82]

There can be no doubt that there was a real issue here concerning the consequences of the nineteenth-century overvaluation of 'individuality'. It is the problem that Mallarmé was to address later in the century as (in the words of Roberto Calasso) 'the first hint of the fact that an immediate correspondence between style and society was no longer possible now'.[83] This is probably why Sainte-Beuve defined the issue as one of 'degree', the

[80] *CL* iii. 49. See also the view of the sixteenth century expressed in the early article on Molière: 'Le XVIe siècle avait été dans son ensemble une vaste décomposition de l'ancienne société religieuse, catholique, féodale, l'avènement de la philosophie dans les esprits et de la bourgeoisie dans la société. Mais cet avènement s'était fait à travers tous les désordres, à travers l'orgie des intelligences et l'anarchie matérielle la plus sanglante, principalement en France, moyennant Rabelais et la Ligue. Le XVIIe siècle eut pour mission de réparer ce désordre, de réorganiser la société, la religion, la résistance; à partir de Henri IV, il s'annonce ainsi, et dans sa plus haute expression monarchique, dans Louis XIV, il couronne son but avec pompe' (Seen in the round, the sixteenth century had been the site of a vast disintegration of an older society, religious, Catholic, feudal, of the arrival of philosophy for reflective minds and, in society, of the bourgeoisie. But this arrival had taken place in the midst of disorder, intellectual riot, and bloody physical anarchy of the most extreme sort, chiefly in France, with Rabelais and the Ligue. The mission of the seventeenth century was to repair this disorder, to reorganize society, religion, resistance; from Henri IV onwards, it declares itself and, in its highest expression, in the figure of Louis XIV, it crowns its goal with great pomp) (*PL* 352).

[81] See Crépu, *Sainte-Beuve*, 217–18.

[82] *Port-Royal*, 833 (emphasis in original).

[83] Roberto Calasso, *Literature and the Gods* (New York, 2001), 130. Calasso quotes from Mallarmé's interview with Jules Huret: 'Surtout manque cette notion indubitable: que, dans une société sans stabilité, sans unité, il ne peut se créer d'art stable, d'art définitif' (What above all is lacking is this indubitable notion: that, in a society without stability, without unity, it is impossible to create a stable art, a definitive art) ('Réponses à des enquêtes sur l'évolution littéraire', in Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1945), 866).

temperature reaching boiling point before what Sainte-Beuve perceived as the insufferable narcissism of the modern poets ('Nos poètes sont dans un état continu d'exaltation personnelle et vaine, d'infatuation qu'ils ne peuvent dissimuler: je dis d'eux qu'ils ont le *priapisme* de l'amour-propre' (Our poets are in a continual state of personal and vain excitation, an infatuation that they are unable to dissimulate; I will say of them that they are afflicted with the *priapism* of vanity)).[84] But, along with these measured gradations of degree, there appears also to have been a more general fear of subjectivity as such, its display not as wanton egocentricity but as the exposure of something deeper: namely, the provisional and contingent nature of the work of art, the waywardness of both its origins (the creation of the work) and its afterlife (the interpretive vicissitudes of its reception). The question of subjectivity was to be another variant of the question of 'foundations'.

Here Sainte-Beuve found himself at a crossroads, with a choice to make (he made the wrong one). Since he was averse to schematic either/or choices, it comes as no surprise to find him weighing both sides of an argument. He was to do so in terms of another set of criteria—the opposition between the 'open' and the 'closed'—in connection with the writer who was later to become the talismanic figure in the academic ideology of the classico-centric: Racine.[85] According to Sainte-Beuve, there are two kinds of literature and two ways of construing literature (there is already a confusion here between literary practice and critical discourse on that practice)—the classical and the modern. In the first of two articles on Racine (in 1862), Sainte-Beuve seemed to align his own critical voice with the latter tendency. 'Je crois comprendre autant qu'un autre les douceurs de la stabilité littéraire, et je ne les contesterai pas' (I believe I understand as well as the next man the pleasures of literary stability, and I will not dispute them). This is the approach of those who claim that 'tout ce qui est grand a été fait' (everything that is great has been done) and that those who come after ('trop tard') can but read, reread, and admire what has come before. It is an approach that contains an error, the bad habit of the purely sedentary ('des classiques assis, éternellement des assis' (sedentary

[84] *Mes poisons*, 130.

[85] In *Sur Racine*, Roland Barthes spoke of the 'paradox' whereby 'l'auteur français qui est sans doute le plus lié à l'idée d'une *transparence* classique, est le seul qui ait réussi à faire converger sur lui tous les langages nouveaux du siècle' (the French author who is doubtless the most closely tied to the idea of a classical *transparency*, the only one to have succeeded in making himself a point of convergence for all the new languages of the century). Against the array of 'critiques closes' that make up the tradition of commentary, Barthes proposed instead a way of reading Racine centred on 'un sens tremblé, et non un sens fermé' (a hovering meaning, and not a closed meaning) (*Sur Racine* (Paris, 1963), 10–11, 148). Sainte-Beuve's attitude to Racine evolved from an early stress on Racine's 'elegiac tenderness' (thus a dramatic poet in some ways close to the romantics) to, above all in *Port-Royal*, an emphasis on the 'perfection' of his style (see Wellek, 'Sainte-Beuve', 44).

classicists, eternally seated)), trapped in an attitude that is 'borné, fermé et tout à fait étranger à la vraie activité intellectuelle toujours renaissante' (narrow, closed and entirely disconnected from the true form of permanently renascent intellectual activity).[86] Against this self-immobilizing laziness, Sainte-Beuve sets another approach:

il y a un autre système, un autre parti à prendre, celui des chercheurs de vérité et de nouveauté, des remueurs d'idées … Art, critique, recommencons donc toujours et ne nous endormons pas … ne proclamons jamais que le Messie est venu en littérature.

there is another system, another position to be taken, that of seekers after truth and novelty, the movers and shakers in the realm of ideas … Art, criticism, let us always be starting over again and not fall asleep … let us never proclaim that in literature the Messiah has arrived.[87]

We must therefore refuse identifying the Temple of Taste with a 'villa endormie',[88] in the same way that in 'De la tradition' Sainte-Beuve warned that preserving the classic is not the same as falling asleep over it.

Four years later he returns both to Racine and, in greater detail, to the two contrasting paradigms centred on the categories of the open and the closed. The classical paradigm belongs with the latter category:

Autrefois, durant la période littéraire régulière, dite classique, on estimait le meilleur poète celui qui avait composé l'œuvre la plus parfaite, le plus clair, le plus agréable à lire, le plus accompli de tout point, l'*Enéide*, la *Jérusalem*, une belle tragédie.

Once upon a time, during the well-ordered literary period, the so-called classical period, one estimated the best poet to be the one who had composed the most perfect work, the one that was clearest, the most agreeable to read, the most accomplished on every point, the *Aeneid*, the *Jerusalem*, a fine tragedy.[89]

The advent of the modern period, however, brings, in both literature and criticism, a major change of taste, oriented less to contemplation of flawless accomplishment than to the text as an open field for the 'work' of the imagination:

Aujourd'hui on veut autre chose. Le plus grand poète pour nous est celui qui, dans ses œuvres, a donné le plus à imaginer et à rêver à son lecteur … Le plus grand poète n'est pas celui qui a le mieux fait; c'est celui qui suggère le plus … car on veut dorénavant que la poésie soit dans le lecteur presque autant que dans l'auteur. Depuis que la critique est née et a grandi … elle n'aime guère les œuvres de poésie entourées d'une parfaite lumière et définitives … Il lui faut matière à construction et à travail pour elle-même … Il ne lui déplaît pas de sentir qu'elle entre pour sa part dans une création … Parlez-moi de *Faust*, de *Béatrix*, de *Mignon*, de *Don Juan*, d'*Hamlet*, de ces types à doubles et triples sens, sujets à discussion, mystérieux par un coin,

[86] *NL* iii. 72–3. [87] *NL* iii. 74–5. [88] *NL* iii. 76. [89] *NL* x. 390.

indéfinis, indéterminés, extensible en quelque sorte, perpétuellement changeants et muables.

Today something else is wanted. The greatest poet for us is the one who in his works offers to his reader the greatest scope for imagining and dreaming … The greatest poet is not the one who produced the best, it is the one who is the most suggestive … for the wish henceforth is for poetry to be as much in the reader as in the writer. Since its birth and growth, criticism … has scarcely no affection for poetic works bathed in a perfect and definitive light … It needs material with which it can itself construct and work … It likes to feel that it has a share in a creation … Speak to me of *Faust*, *Beatrice*, *Mignon*, *Don Juan*, *Hamlet*, those types with double and triple meanings, open to discussion, with an element of the mysterious, indefinite, indeterminate, in some way extensible, perpetually changeable and mutable.[90]

This looks like a late-life manifesto supporting the cause of the new, but we need to proceed with some care in attributing the positions it outlines unambiguously to Sainte-Beuve himself. The passage is a brilliant description of the modern temper (both Baudelaire and Flaubert affirmed a similar view of the 'suggestive' powers of modern literature), but a description is not the same as the declaration of a personal preference for an aesthetic of the unfinished, the indeterminate, and the mutable, permanently open to the constructions of the reader. This is indeed what the moderns prefer, but Sainte-Beuve's pronoun *nous* may well be merely the external designation of a collectivity rather than a gesture of self-inclusion in that collectivity. The times have changed, but whether ultimately for better or for worse is still a question. On the whole, in Sainte-Beuve's accounting, it was for the worse, reflecting a cultural loss as well as a mere historical difference. For Sainte-Beuve the modern takes its leave from the spirit of the classic and the aura of the classical not just because of its commitment to the new (on this point Sainte-Beuve remains more or less resolutely Stendhalian), but because of its cultivation of a particular form of the new, the aesthetic of the unfinished as encapsulating a striving towards the *for ever* new.

This was not a prospect that Sainte-Beuve could contemplate with equanimity. It was too messy, excessively vulnerable to the vagaries of an ambiguity-generating subjectivity, not unlike Boileau's criticism of pastoral 'on the grounds that it used words in such a way as to multiply their meanings and so to make them incomprehensible'.[91] But in order to turn his back on it, Sainte-Beuve had to forge a straw man, a tendentious view of the literary

[90] *NL* x. 391–2.
[91] Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), 40–1.

forms of the culture 'dite classique' as forms closed to interpretation, about which there is strictly nothing to say:

> Quand une fois je les ai vues et admirées dans leur pureté de dessin, dans leur contour, qu'ai-je tant à dire de Didon et d'Armide, de Bradamante ou de Clorinde, d'Angélique ou d'Herminie? … Quand on a lu le *Lutrin* ou *Athalie*, l'esprit s'est récréé ou s'est élevé, on a goûté un noble ou un fin plaisir; mais tout est dit, c'est parfait, c'est définitif, et après … ?
>
> When once I have seen and admired them in the purity of their design, in their contour, is there a great deal for me to say about Dido and Armida, Bradamante or Clorinda, Angelica or Herminia? … When one has read the *Lutrin* or *Athalie*, the mind has recreated or elevated itself, one has tasted a noble or a fine pleasure; but everything has been said, it is perfect, it is definitive, and then what … ?[92]

The distinction between the closed and the open may recall the opposition in 'De la tradition' between the classic as 'settled' and the romantic as 'wandering', but they are not in fact synonymous pairs. In 'De la tradition' Sainte-Beuve felt able to combine the stress on the settled with a commitment to renewing the classic through successive interpretations of it ('les interpréter continuellement à chaque génération nouvelle de la jeunesse'). In the late text on Racine this emphasis has disappeared, and it provides a further, and altogether more defensive, context for the reproach levelled at Chateaubriand and his successors. Beyond the more superficial worry that behind appearances there was a 'hollow' fraudulence lay the deeper fear that there was another, more radical hollowness, namely the fear that there was nothing at all, that literature was a box of man-made tricks. This was far more than a finely honed suspicion of the 'charlatan' prancing in regal garb; it was another variant of the anxiety over the relation between convention and foundations. Just as one must draw a veil over the raw facts of power and authority in society, so one must conceal the origins of the work of art. The book on Chateaubriand is one of the places where Sainte-Beuve expresses both his distaste over a tendency in modern writing to expose 'à nu' what lies behind the veil and his condemnation of revolution (specifically the revolution of 1848) as the moment when 'les conditions de la société ont été remises en question, et … les fondements de l'édifice ont été de nouveau exposés à nu' (the conditions of society have once more been put in question, and … the foundations of the edifice have again been laid bare).[93] The same parallel emerges in the text on Racine, with reference back this time to the Revolution of 1789, 'la plus terrible des Révolutions qui a remis les fondements de la société à nu' (the most terrible of Revolutions which has again laid bare the foundations of

[92] *NL* x. 391. [93] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 390–2.

society).[94] Revolutionary politics and modernist poetics share the same fault: opening up to scrutiny what is best withheld from view.

In his comments on the 'faults' of Montesquieu's style, Sainte-Beuve asserts that 'Il y a des ouvrages qu'il ne faut pas voir de trop près: ce sont des monuments' (There are works that should not be seen too close up: they are monuments).[95] In *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire* he quotes Joubert's observation: 'L'art est de cacher l'art' (Art is the hiding of art),[96] precisely what Chateaubriand himself failed to do; the weakness of *Les Martyrs* lies in the way its style and method bring us to 'connaître le *comment* de la composition, d'en suivre du doigt le mécanisme' (to know the *how* of the composition, to trace with one's finger its mechanism).[97] The local issues here are very specific (in the first case, Joubert's reservations over the pseudo-erudition in Chateaubriand's use of quotations and, in connection with *Les Martyrs*, the redundant doubling of descriptive passages, prime instance of 'ces pages à effet' (those pages for effect) that mar the attempted recreation of the epic mode). But there is also something more general, again comparable perhaps to Mallarmé's perplexed dance around the question of the 'mécanisme littéraire' mirrored in the sinews of his own perplexing prose.[98] Sainte-Beuve reproduces one of La Rochefoucauld's maxims: 'Il ne faut jamais, dit La Rochefoucauld, rien dire avec un air d'autorité, ni montrer aucune supériorité d'esprit' ('One must never', says La Rochefoucauld, 'say anything with an air of authority or show any superiority of mind'),[99] the undemonstrative being, of course, the very demonstration of both authority and superiority. Sainte-Beuve's own reformulations of La Rochefoucauld's dictum include the claim (in 'Dix ans en littérature') that the new should always appear without seeming such, and the

[94] *NL* iii. 76. [95] *CL* vii. 72.

[96] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 297. [97] Ibid. ii. 20 (emphasis in original).

[98] 'Nous savons, captifs d'une formule absolue que, certes, n'est que ce qui est. Incontinent écarter cependant, sous un prétexte, le leurre, accuserait notre inconséquence, niant le plaisir que nous voulons prendre: car cet *au-delà* en est l'agent, et le moteur dirais-je, si je ne répugnais à opérer, en public, le démontage impie de la fiction et conséquemment du mécanisme littéraire, pour étaler la pièce principale ou rien. Mais je vénère comment, par une superchérie, on projette, à quelque élévation défendue et de foudre! le conscient manque chez nous de ce qui là-haut éclate. A quoi sert cela?—A un jeu' (We know, captives of an absolute formula that indeed there is only that which is. Forthwith to dismiss the cheat, however, on a pretext, would indict our inconsequence, denying the pleasure we want to take: for that beyond is its agent, and the engine I might say were I not loath to perform, in public, the impious dismantling of the fiction and consequently of the literary mechanism, display the principal part or nothing. But I venerate how, by a trick, we project to a height forfended—and with thunder!—the conscious lack in us of what shines up there. What is it for? A game) (*La Musique et les Lettres*, in Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, 647). For an incisive commentary on this passage, and its implications for the relations between literature and society, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Literary Production* (Cambridge, 1993), 72–3. See also my comments in 'Modernism's Nightmare: Art, Matter, Mechanism', *New Left Review* (July–Aug. 2001), 141–56.

[99] *CL* xi. 418.

following gem from *Mes poisons*: 'La littérature ne me paraît jamais avoir plus de saveur que quand elle vient de quelqu'un qui ne se doute pas qu'il fait de la littérature' (Literature strikes me as never more flavourful than when produced by someone who does not think of himself as producing literature).[100] This effortless eclipse of overt self-consciouness Sainte-Beuve thought he found in the seventeenth century; the latter was a *plein*, in contrast to the abyssal *creux* opened up in the nineteenth century, nurtured by a cultural serenity that required neither explanation nor justification: 'Au contraire, jamais le *plein* des choses ne se sent mieux que quand on tient en main les grands écrits du siècle de Louis XIV' (On the contrary, the *plenitude* of things is never more keenly felt than when one has in one's hands the great writings of the age of Louis XIV).[101] The imperturbability of the classic derives from its lack of any felt need to inspect its own foundations. The classic simply *is*, impervious to discussion.

This was the ideology in which Sainte-Beuve ensnared himself, and, for his public role as critic, it came laden with paradoxes. For in the invitation that the modern work offers to interpretation we find one of the conditions that make criticism possible. Historically, as Sainte-Beuve himself maintains, literary modernity is coincident with and constitutive of the enterprise of literary criticism ('Depuis que la critique est née et a grandi … elle n'aime guère les œuvres de poésie entourées d'une parfaite lumière et définitives … Il lui faut matière à construction et à travail pour elle-même' (Since its birth and growth, criticism … has scarcely no affection for poetic works bathed in a perfect and definitive light … It needs material with which it can itself construct and work)). For this reason, Sainte-Beuve, who consciously chose criticism as the basis of nearly a whole working life, could not be anything other than a modernist. Worship at the altar of the 'classic', whose definition as a perfection consigns its reader to a form of mutism, thus denied the very conditions of his own existence as a critic (how different the superlative testimony to Sainte-Beuve's conception of himself as a truly *modern* critic in *Mes poisons*[102]). And yet this is in effect what, from within an impossible aporia, he sought to do, possibly because he sensed that the birth of modern criticism would lead eventually to an implosion of the classico-centric orthodoxy, generating what Barthes was to call 'une crise générale du Commentaire'.[103] The last thing Sainte-Beuve would have wanted to be seen as was the forerunner of a crisis of commentary.

Irving Babbitt said that for the Sainte-Beuve of the 1830s the 'critic is a sort of gypsy or vagrant in the intellectual world, without settled abode of his own', but is then quick to add that this 'conception of the critic could

[100] *Mes poisons*, 127.

[101] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, i. 308. Bossuet's French is also characterized as 'plein, substantiel … ' (*NL* ii. 348).

[102] See Ch. 1.

[103] Barthes, *Critique et vérité*, 48.

scarcely satisfy Sainte-Beuve permanently'.[104] This was a way of trying to say that Sainte-Beuve was simultaneously of his age and not of it. It also underlies the remarkable claim in the concluding paragraph of Babbitt's study: 'That so shrewd an observer as Sainte-Beuve could find no firm anchorage for the spirit in the movements peculiar to his century may in the long run turn out to be not to his discredit, but to the discredit of his century.'[105] This will not work. In the first place 'discredit' seems inappropriately moralistic for a set of issues of this nature. Secondly, we cannot detach Sainte-Beuve from his century; he did not simply turn up at the wrong address at the wrong time, like a ghost among the living. It was absurd for Sainte-Beuve to berate his century for having abandoned what was lost to him for exactly the same reasons. At his strongest, he repudiated the bad faith of this absurdity. At his weakest, however, he succumbed to the belief that he belonged, or to the wish to have belonged, in another time, a time imagined as without criticism, free of the burdens of critical consciousness, in short, a time without Sainte-Beuve. His notorious 'resentment' was in part, paradoxically and incoherently, a resentment of his own existence as professional bookman. In its place he put the nostalgic shibboleth of the 'amateur', in contrast to everything that makes the bookman—whether critic or writer—a 'worker', caught up in the division of labour, specialization of function, uncomfortably close to the means of production ('le *comment* de la composition'):

> Où est le temps où, quand on lisait un livre, eût-on été soi-même un auteur et un homme du métier, on n'y mettait pas tant de raisonnements et de façons; où l'impression de la lecture venait doucement vous prendre et vous saisir … où on lisait Anciens et Modernes couché sur son lit de repos comme Horace pendant la canicule, où étendu sur son sofa comme Gray … Heureux âge, où est-il? Et que rien n'y ressemble moins que d'être toujours sur les épines comme aujourd'hui en lisant, que de prendre garde à chaque pas, de se questionner sans cesse … à redevenir un travailleur et un ouvrier enfin, au lieu d'un voluptueux et d'un délicat qui respirait l'esprit des choses et n'en prenait que ce qu'il en faut pour s'y délecter et s'y complaire!
>
> Where is the time when, reading a book, even as oneself an author, a professional, one did not put into it so much reasoning and so much fuss; when the impressions of reading came and seized you softly … when one read the Ancients and the Moderns lying on one's bed like Horace during the heatwave, or stretched out on the sofa like Gray … Happy age, where has it gone? And when nothing resembles it less than being always preoccupied with difficulties as is the case today when reading, treading carefully with every step, questioning oneself ceaselessly … becoming a worker and an artisan in short, instead of a voluptuary with delicate taste, who breathes in the essence of things and takes from them only what is needed for delectation and pleasure![106]

[104] Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, 125–6.
[105] Ibid. 188.
[106] *NL* ix. 86–7.

This, astonishingly, comes from the meta-critical paper 'Essai de critique naturelle', describing what an intellectually busy modern criticism might look like. We are back on the sofa, in the pleasures of silence, far from the inquiring reflexivities that go with a sense of the work as unfinished and imperfect, with an ideal of composure in an age for which the 'composed' in the sense of the manufactured was no longer compatible with the 'composed' in the sense of restful. Criticism, Sainte-Beuve tells us in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, should be a kind of 'cordial',[107] a restorative in a time of 'restoration' presumably quaffed while 'couché sur son lit de repos', a spiritual essence and balm for the soul. Despite the various warnings against taking up sedentary residence in the 'villa endormie',[108] we return to where we began, the peroration in praise of sedentarity at the close of 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' or to the 'regret' expressed in his remarks on Mme de Sévigné 'que tout ne soit pas définitif dans ce monde des lettres qui nous est un asile et une sorte d'Elysée terrestre' (that not everything is definitive in this world of letters that is for us a refuge and a sort of earthly Elysium).[109]

These were the Elysian Fields on which Sainte-Beuve's effort to think through the possibility of the modern classic died. What took its place was the merely retrograde. Let us visit Sainte-Beuve one last time in counterfactual register, in the article on Delavigne and contemporary drama. The example is a spectacular one, a syntactic tour de force, although the elaborateness of its clausal structure is incommensurate with the poverty of its content. But it is precisely because of the mismatch of form and content that it needs to be read in its entirety.

Messieurs, je me suis demandé quelquefois: Que serait-il arrivé si un poète dramatique éminent de cette école que vous m'accorderez la permission de ne pas définir, mais que j'appellerai franchement l'*école classique*, si, au moment du plus grand assaut contraire et jusqu'au plus fort d'un entraînement qu'on jugera comme on le voudra, mais qui a certainement eu lieu, si, dis-je, ce poète dramatique, en possession jusque-là de la faveur publique, avait résisté plutôt que cédé, s'il n'en avait tiré occasion et motif que pour remonter davantage à ses sources à lui, et redoubler de netteté dans la couleur, de simplicité dans les moyens, d'unité dans l'action, attentif de creuser de plus en plus, pour nous les rendre grandioses, ennoblies et dans l'austère attitude tragique, les passions vraies de la nature humaine; si ce poète n'avait usé du changement d'alentour que pour se modifier, lui, en ce sens-là, en ce sens unique, de plus en plus classique (dans la franche acception du mot), je me le suis demandé souvent, que serait-il arrivé? Certes il aurait pu y avoir quelques mauvais tours à passer, quelques luttes pénibles à soutenir contre le flot. Mais il me semble, et ne vous semble-t-il pas également, Messieurs, qu'après des orages bien moindres sans doute que n'eurent à supporter les vaillants adversaires, et durant lesquels se serait achevé cette lente épuration idéale,

[107] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 129. [108] *NL* iii. 76. [109] *NL* i. 286.

telle que je la conçois, le poète tragique perfectionné et persistant aurait retrouvé un public reconnaissant et fidèle, un public grossi, et bien mieux qu'un niveau paisible, je veux dire un flot remontant qui l'aurait repris et porté plus haut.

Gentlemen, I have sometimes asked myself: what would have happened if an eminent dramatist of the school that you will allow me not to define but that I will call frankly the *classical school*, if, at the moment of the strongest assault by the opposed camp, along with the headlong excesses that will be judged as one sees fit, but that have certainly occurred, if, as I say, this dramatic poet, buoyed up by the public, had resisted rather than yielded, if he had availed himself of this support in order to return with greater determination to his own sources and to accentuate clarity in colour, simplicity of means, unity of action, intent on fathoming more deeply, in order to transmit them to us in a form that was grandiose, ennobled, held in the austerely tragic posture, the true passions of human nature; if this poet had exploited a changing environment only with a view to modifying his dispositions in the requisite direction, this uniquely more and more classical direction (in the candid meaning of the term), I have often wondered: what would have happened? To be sure, there would have been some difficult things to negotiate, some hard struggles to mount against the tide. But it seems to me, and does it not equally seem to you, gentlemen, that after some storms far easier to deal with than those encountered by the valiant adversaries, and in the course of which that slow ideal expurgation would have been accomplished in the terms in which I conceive it, the perfected and persistent tragic poet would have refound a grateful and loyal public, an enlarged public, and something far better than a merely peaceful niche, I mean to say a rising tide that would have taken hold of him and raised him higher.[110]

In this complete volte-face over his more Stendhalian critical beliefs, we have the longest by far of Sainte-Beuve's counterfactuals, its inordinate length an index of both an intensity of longing and a futility of expectation. He would have been well advised to heed what he said in *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*: 'Le champ est trop vaste de ce qui n'a pas été et ce qui *aurait pu être*' (The field of what has not been and what *could have been* is too vast).[111] At his best Sainte-Beuve did just this, for example, in his brief survey of the history of French literary prose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (from Mme de Caylus to Rousseau), where change entails both losses and gains and where there is no going back to what has been left behind. Rousseau revolutionized prose ('la plus grande révolution depuis Pascal' (the greatest revolution since Pascal)) such that 'la pure forme du XVIIIe siècle' (the pure form of the eighteenth century) can henceforth be seen only as 'une antiquité grâcieuse' (a gracious antiquity).[112] What could have induced Sainte-Beuve to

[110] *PC* v. 184–5.
[111] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, ii. 176 (emphasis in original).
[112] *CL* iii. 78–9.

linger in this counterfactual space, above all in connection with a writer like Delavigne, if not an arrested conception of the meaning of the word *classique* ('dans son acception la plus franche')? We can concede the reservations over Hugo's brand of romantic drama (a box of tricks if ever there was one), but as a counter-proposal this could be Nisard speaking. 'Que serait-il arrivé?', muses Sainte-Beuve. What actually happened, the form in which Sainte-Beuve was to have his wish granted, was the moribund neoclassical verse tragedies of Ponsard.[113]

[113] In Sainte-Beuve's account of Ponsard's induction to the Académie française, it is indeed Nisard speaking or rather both Nisard and Sainte-Beuve speaking together as if with a common voice: 'Monsieur Nisard s'est acquitté de ce devoir agréable avec cette vigueur de pensée et cette fermeté ingénieuse qu'il a en propre et qu'il développe de plus en plus chaque jour. Il a très-bien expliqué les nobles motifs de la faveur de M. Ponsard, par les sources où son talent s'inspire; il a montré comment le succès de cette chaste et sobre *Lucrèce*, qui est une date littéraire, était préparé d'avance et vaguement désiré, par suite des fatigues et des ennuis dûs aux excès d'un genre plus turbulent' (Monsieur Nisard has discharged this agreeable duty with that intellectual vigour and ingenious firmness that are properly his and that he develops more and more with each day that passes. He has explained very well the noble motives behind the favour accorded to M. Ponsard, by going to the sources where his talent is most at home; he has shown how the ground of that chaste and sober *Lucrèce*, which made its literary mark, was prepared in advance and distantly desired as a consequence of the fatigue and boredom arising from the excesses of a more turbulent genre) (*CL* xv. 303–4).

# 11

# Postscript: The Good Frenchman

## I

Arguably the main point of reading Sainte-Beuve on the subject of the classic is that he was one of the last to use the term with the confidence that came from a history of which he felt himself to be, belatedly but coherently, a part. On the other hand, reinforcing that confidence—shoring up the foundations—required some fairly desperate spadework in the trenches, into which he himself was to fall, as confidence—and with it coherence—simply leaked away before the demands of sustaining the viability of the term in relation to his own contemporaries. We know that this debacle in Sainte-Beuve's thinking sprang from an inability or, more wilfully, a refusal to extend his remarkable gifts of critical 'sympathy' to the very figures who are now routinely classified as 'modern classics': Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Baudelaire. The litany of critical mishits here is, of course, legendary, the most revealing perhaps the 1854 retrospective on Stendhal as both critic and novelist, not least because here Sainte-Beuve notes that, in the minds of some, Stendhal already qualifies for canonization as a classic (those who see him as 'un ancien, presque comme un classique' (an ancient, almost a classic)).[1]

It is a point of view that Sainte-Beuve claims would have 'astounded' Stendhal himself (code for Sainte-Beuve's own astonishment). Sainte-Beuve is astonished, not because it is too early to tell whether Stendhal will qualify, but because there is not the slightest chance of him ever qualifying. What follows, in the review of Stendhal's novels, is the progressive evaporation of even the remnants of critical intelligence. Julien Sorel is 'un petit monstre odieux, impossible, un scélérat qui ressemble à un Robespierre jeté dans la vie civile et l'intrigue domestique' (an odious and impossible little monster, a rogue resembling a Robespierre thrown into civil life and domestic intrigue),[2] a view that, since patently it is not unequivocally shared by his creator, redounds to Stendhal's discredit; the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir* cannot

[1] *CL* ix. 301. [2] *CL* x. 330.

be admired because his central character is not admirable (a presumption in which the 'biographical' method goes into reverse, permitting an inference from work to man). As for what we are supposed to see as the enchantingly unpredictable hero of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Fabrice del Dongo, this is simply a misperception generated by Stendhal's idealization of Italy. In reality (whatever that is meant to signify with reference to a work of fiction), Fabrice 'est fort laid, fort plat, fort vulgaire' (is very ugly, very flat, very vulgar)—this largely because he is an Italian, his vices thus falsely converted by Stendhal to virtues. A dose of *La Chartreuse de Parme* accordingly calls for corrective medicine: 'Au sortir de cette lecture, j'ai besoin de relire quelque roman tout simple et tout uni, d'une bonne et large nature humaine, où les tantes ne soient pas éprises de leurs neveux' (On exiting from this reading, I need to reread a simple and harmonious novel, with a good and broad conception of human nature, in which aunts are not enamoured of their nephews) (a consideration not, however, applied to that model of 'decorum', Racine's *Phèdre*).[3]

This brew of naivety and prejudice is tasteless enough. But it becomes positively sour when Sainte-Beuve turns his sights on Balzac, contact with whom requires not just an antidote but an ablution ritual. There is a gesture at dispassionateness in the retrospective devoted to Balzac in 1850.[4] But revulsion is never far from the surface and bursts forth in the thrice-repeated quotation of Ampère's (not so) *bon mot* to the effect that after reading Balzac one needs to wash one's hands: 'il me semble toujours que j'ai besoin de me laver les mains ou de brosser mes habits' (I always feel I need to wash my hands or brush my clothes).[5] From there it was but a step to substituting the role of hunter for that of critic: 'Chaque critique a son gibier favori sur lequel il tombe et qu'il dépèce de préférence … Pour moi, c'est Balzac' (Every critic has his favourite wild game on which by preference to fall and cut to pieces … For me, it is Balzac).[6]

Flaubert's masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, is damned with faint praise ('il a le *style*. Il en a même un peu trop' (he has *style*. He has perhaps a little too much of it)[7]), and moreover, as the work of a morally indifferent 'anatomist' whose scalpel ruthlessly excises the proper place due to 'virtue', it fails to offer us 'consolation' for the sufferings it depicts: 'Pourquoi ne pas avoir mis là un seul personnage qui soit de nature à consoler, à reposer le lecteur par un bon spectacle?' (Why did he not include a single character whose nature it is to console, to soothe the reader with the spectacle of something good?).[8] A similar preference was stated in connection with Balzac, the hope that the end of the

[3] *CL* x. 335. [4] *CL* ii. 443–63.
[5] *Mes poisons* (Paris, 1926), 110 (see also *NL* xiii. 262 and *PC* ii. 346).
[6] *Mes poisons*, 111. [7] *CL* xiii. 351. [8] *CL* xiii. 362.

morally coarse age simultaneously producing and reflected in the *Comédie humaine* might be succeeded by a future age creating 'des tableaux non moins vastes, mais plus apaisés, plus consolants' (pictures no less vast, but calmer, more consoling) (the actual successor to Balzac's vast fresco was, of course, Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*).[9] These are the pieties of the nineteenth-century *bienpensant* bourgeois. Some years later he was to add insult to injury. It is hard to imagine anything more demeaning than the comparison of Flaubert with Feydeau. Sainte-Beuve managed it. In the review of *Madame Bovary*, he commended the novelist's powers with 'le pays normand qu'il nous décrit avec une vérité incomparable' (the Normandy countryside that he describes for us with incomparable truthfulness).[10] Comparability is, however, what he introduced when, in 1861, he praised a novel so obscure as to have since disappeared from even the most recondite bibliography, *L'Honnête Femme* by Louis Veuillot (of whom more shortly), for having got there before *Madame Bovary*: 'Savez-vous qu'il a devancé *Madame Bovary* pour certaines peintures étonnantes de vérité locale?' (Do you know that he anticipated *Madame Bovary* with certain astonishing pictures of local colour?).[11]

Finally, there is the case of Baudelaire, about which there is very little to say, primarily because Sainte-Beuve himself had so little to say, an instance of missing the boat by means of benign neglect, bordering on the pusillanimous, when the adoring and supplicant Baudelaire was most in need of support. There is an affectionate pat on the back at the time of the trial of *Les Fleurs du mal* ('vous avez dû beaucoup souffrir, mon cher enfant' (you must have suffered greatly, my dear child)[12]), but—from the illustrious author of the *Lundis*—not a word in the public sphere of print.[13] At the time of Baudelaire's ill-fated candidacy for election to the Académie française in 1862, there is a note to the effect that with Baudelaire 'on se trouve en présence d'un candidat poli, respectueux, exemplaire, d'un gentil garçon, fin de langage *et tout à fait classique dans les formes*' (we have before us a candidate who is polite, respectful, exemplary, a fine boy, whose language is subtle and who is *formally altogether classical*).[14] Quite classical, no less, enough to justify a recommendation on behalf of this 'fine boy', but not quite enough to overcome—the emphasis now Sainte-Beuve's—'*la folie Baudelaire*'.[15] And then in 1865 a review of the state of 'contemporary' poetry, expatiating on Jean-Pierre Veyrat and Evariste Boulay-Paty (who?), with Baudelaire nowhere in sight.

[9] *CL* ii. 463. [10] *CL* xiii. 347. [11] *NL* i. 59. [12] *CL* ix. 528.

[13] The pat on the back was in a private letter published only later in the Appendices of vol. ix of the *Causeries du lundi*.

[14] *NL* i. 402 (emphasis added). [15] *NL* i. 401.

Proust was understating the case when he wrote that 'Sainte-Beuve a méconnu tous les grands écrivains de son temps' (Sainte-Beuve misjudged all the great writers of his time).[16] Sainte-Beuve himself never spoke a truer word than when he confessed in *Mes poisons* that, with his contemporaries, he could never talk of their work, but only of their person ('Il me devient presque impossible d'écrire sur les principaux auteurs du temps; j'en suis depuis longtemps à juger, non plus leurs ouvrages, mais leur personne même' (It has become almost impossible for me to write about the principal authors of the time; for some time now I have found myself judging no longer their works but their very person)).[17] To get the full truth of this, however, we need to rework 'person' as the intrusion of 'personality', most notably Sainte-Beuve's own, his inability here to respect his own principle of literary 'justice' and to detach critical judgement from an emotional undergrowth compounded of envy, malice, and cowardice. Proust was devastatingly right on this point. Caveats have been entered, but basically there is no plausible exit strategy before Proust's relentless prosecution.

This, however, is a long-familiar story and somewhat to the side of our principal concern. That Sainte-Beuve failed to see Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Baudelaire as the great writers they were can be ascribed almost entirely to these temperamental weaknesses. That he was unable to see them as actual or incipient 'modern classics' is a more complex and overdetermined matter. Reasons other than personal flaws would include the prematurity argument (the difficulty of second-guessing the future), and the stranglehold of an increasingly ideological conception of the classic. But perhaps above all it is because, given the exacerbated 'openness' that characterizes so much of the writing in question, the term 'classic' quite simply no longer fits. With Flaubert and Baudelaire in particular, it is revealed as past its sell-by date, no longer useful as a term of either classification or evaluation. In *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Barthes specified 1850 as the date of a major rupture: 'l'écriture classique a donc éclaté et la Littérature entière, de Flaubert à nos jours, est devenue une problématique du langage' (classical writing thus exploded and the whole of Literature, from Flaubert to the present, has become a problematic of language).[18] This has been rightly identified (by Frank Kermode) as faulty literary history, but it also expresses the important recognition that *classique* (understood as the site of what unselfconsciously goes without saying, as fully naturalized convention, that is, precisely the terms of much of Sainte-Beuve's

[16] Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1971), 190. Well before Proust, Zola also reproached Sainte-Beuve for his comprehensive failure to engage with the challenge of literary modernity (*La Critique contemporaine*, in *Œuvres complètes* (15 vols.; Paris, 1966–70), xii. 485–7).

[17] *Mes poisons*, 27.

[18] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris, 1972), 8.

later thinking[19]) makes no sense in relation to writers for whom the category of the 'natural' is no longer anything with which they feel naturally at home.[20]

## II

It may well be, then, that the lesson of Sainte-Beuve for us is that it is time to let go. Sainte-Beuve seems to have glimpsed this in his own remarks on the unfinished and the modern, and his sense of historical realism would have encouraged tracing out its implications. But, because of the ideological tourniquet in which his ideas were progressively caught, this was a prospect he could only deplore.[21] Instead he wasted large amounts of intellectual energy on a quixotically retrograde plea for the revival of the classic in the conditions of the Second Empire, the very period that witnessed and in turn intensified a huge acceleration of movement, flux, and change, a material landscape on which the circulation of capital everywhere left traces of the unfinished, the landscape that inspired Baudelaire's poetic musings on debris and fragments as well as his more abstract formulation of the aesthetic of modernity tied to the ephemeral, the transitory, and the fugitive. It is true that Baudelaire also stressed the other moiety of the Beautiful as consisting of the eternal. But the 'eternal' is a multidimensional term in Baudelaire's vocabulary, and includes the eternity of hell, that agitated return of the same in the mask of the ever-new. Sainte-Beuve's 'perfection' is not at all like this.

Yet, even when the works themselves seem to be inviting us to take this road, there remains an understandable reluctance to let go. We continue to describe *Madame Bovary* and *Les Fleurs du mal* as 'modern classics' without any profound sense of any incongruity in doing so. But the usage is loose, imparts no real information, and is often indistinguishable from a marketing tactic. There have, of course, been more powerful advocates of the case for

[19] By 'naturalized' here I do not mean 'natural'. Naturalization involves concealment, the workings of ideology on convention as described by Barthes in *Mythologies*. As we have seen, Sainte-Beuve never confuses convention with nature, but his thought is strongly invested in strategies of concealment, both artistic and political.

[20] Barthes's argument is to some extent bounded by a Gallo-centric frame of reference in so far as the discrediting of the appellation 'classic' is, in the specifically French case, inextricable from the ideology of the 'classical', reflected in the linguistic fact that the term *classique* bears both meanings.

[21] Proust's hostility to Sainte-Beuve may have as much to do with his modernist aesthetic of the 'unfinished' as with his insistence on the separation of the biographical and creative selves. The splendid meditation (in *La Prisonnière*) on the open and unfinished character of 'les grandes œuvres du XIXe siècle' can be read as belonging somewhere in his sustained polemic against Sainte-Beuve.

retention of the term. One such is Kermode's sophisticated argument for replacing 'the imperial classic' with 'a modern version of the classic', the latter grasped as 'a permanent locus of change'.[22] An even more spirited effort is John Coetzee's essay whose title deliberately echoes both Sainte-Beuve and T. S. Eliot. For Coetzee, the 'classic' is indeed that which survives, but not by virtue of its 'possession of some essential quality'. It survives in the face of 'attack' (by the 'barbarian') and does so 'because generations of people cannot afford to let go of it and therefore hold on to it at all costs—that is the classic'. There is something self-declaredly paradoxical in this definition ('So we arrive at a paradox'). The paradox in question is described as follows, in the splendid closing paragraphs of Coetzee's essay, coincidentally using the expression 'the function of criticism' while assigning a quite different value to it:

> The classic defines itself by surviving. Therefore the interrogation of the classic, no matter how hostile, is part of the history of the classic, inevitable and even to be welcomed. For as long as the classic needs to be protected from attack, it can never prove itself classic. One might even venture further along this road to say that the function of criticism is defined by the classic: criticism is that which is duty-bound to interrogate the classic. Thus the fear that the classic will not survive the decentering acts of criticism may be turned on its head: rather than being the foe of the classic, criticism, and indeed criticism of the most sceptical kind, may be what the classic uses to define itself and ensure its survival. Criticism may in that sense be one of the instruments of the cunning of history.[23]

This Hegelian thought is not one that Sainte-Beuve would have entertained or, had he done so, would have commended. He would have agreed, albeit on very different terms, that the survival of the classic is one of the means by which 'civilization' resists 'barbarism'. But what he understood by 'barbarism' was something very different. In his defence of the classic, Coetzee enlists the testimony of Zbigniew Herbert on the subjection of Poland to twentieth-century forms of barbarism. This brings us face to face with another paradox, a dark irony. What, in France, came after Sainte-Beuve, as the poisoned legacy of the man who so often wrote of legacy, was a determined reclaiming of the classic and classical values by the far right, also in the name of resisting a version of modern 'barbarism' (a series of developments not without its effects on Eliot's thinking).

The ironies informing what Sainte-Beuve bequeathed to posterity can be mapped on several fronts. The 'legacy' is often seen as contributing to the formation of the discipline of a 'scientific' literary history, above all in the hands of Gustave Lanson. Lanson was initially hostile to Sainte-Beuve, but

[22] Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London, 1975), 139–40.
[23] John Coetzee, 'What is a Classic?', in *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays* (New York, 2001), 16.

eventually came round to saluting him as a predecessor.[24] In 1904, shortly after his election to a chair at the Sorbonne, Lanson served on an appointments committee that had to choose between two candidates for nomination to an academic post: Paul Gautier and Gustave Michaut, both of whom had submitted their doctoral theses the previous year, respectively 'Mme de Staël et Napoléon' and 'Sainte-Beuve avant les "Lundis". Essai sur la formation de son esprit et de sa méthode critique'. After some hesitation, Lanson voted for Michaut (Émile Faguet voted for Gautier). There is more to this episode than a small footnote in the archive of Sorbonne business. Gautier, like Faguet, was a member of the Ligue de la Patrie française founded in 1898, successor of the Ligue des Patriotes français and forerunner of Action française.[25]

These were the right-wing groups that, from the Dreyfus Affair onwards, were to announce a 'crisis' in the secular educational system of the Third Republic, in turn identified as a symptom of a wider crisis of modern democracy (what one of their supporters, Pierre Lasserre, himself a close associate of Charles Maurras, was significantly to call 'barbarie intellectuelle').[26] Lanson and his acolytes became one of their prime targets, for having sponsored a view of literary history and the teaching of the 'classics' as a form of enlightened 'civic instruction'.[27] Under the new lay-democratic dispensation, the culture of the 'classic' was being instrumentally despoiled, or simply abandoned. In 1910 Agathon (a pseudonym for Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde) published a collection of articles with the title *L'Esprit de la nouvelle Sorbonne. La Crise de la culture classique, la crise du français*; Lasserre followed suit in 1912 with *La Doctrine officielle de l'Université. Critique du haut enseignement de l'État, défense et théorie des humanités classiques*.[28] This reactive aggression was directed, moreover, not only at the modern study of literature in the universities, but also at modern literature itself, from the Romantics to Mallarmé. With a mix of formidable intelligence and ferocious polemical passion, Lasserre mounted,

[24] See Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième république des lettres* (Paris, 1983), 174–5.
[25] Antoine Compagnon, *Connaissez-vous Brunetière?* (Paris, 1997), 199.
[26] Pierre Lasserre, *Les Chapelles littéraires* (Paris, 1920), 201.
[27] Compagnon, *La Troisième république des lettres*, 83.
[28] In his introduction Lasserre informs us that his book originates in 'une trentaine de leçons professées en 1908 et 1909 à l'Institut d'Action française' (thirty-odd classes given in 1908 and 1909 at the Institute of Action française). Its principal argument centres on a series of educational reforms during the Third Republic, alleged to constitute a betrayal of the 'classics' ('les humanités classiques') in the school and university curriculum, thus resurrecting, in a new political context, the old association between classic and classroom, now identified as a core issue in the fate of the national 'soul' (*La Doctrine officielle de l'Université. Critique du haut enseignment de l'État, défense et théorie des humanités classiques* (Paris, 1912), 9–11). Both the scale and the locale of the perceived menace are reflected in the title of part II of the book 'La Barbarie en Sorbonne'.

in 1907, an assault on the Romantics in *Le Romantisme français*, many of its terms suggesting that he was inspired by Sainte-Beuve.[29] Maurras launched a broadside against Mallarmé for his 'un-French' de-naturalizing and, as it were, de-territorializing of the language.[30] Brasillach later followed suit (accusing Mallarmé of acting 'contre la langue française'), although his more general position on the value of Mallarmé remained ambivalent ('praising the poet while condemning the writer of prose').[31] Did Sainte-Beuve have something similar in mind when he described Baudelaire's poetry as an exotic 'kiosque … qui attire les regards à la pointe extrême du Kamtchatka romantique' (kiosk … which draws the gaze to the farthest point of the romantic Kamchatka)—that is, as blown in on the winds from the Siberian steppes and thus originating somewhere other than France?[32] The whole wretched business was to come to a head when Vandérem issued his call in the 1920s for a 'fascisme littéraire'.[33]

Against this background, the question of the 'legacy' of Sainte-Beuve took a different, and alarming, turn. In 1898 Maurras published his pamphlet *Trois idées politiques*, advertised in a prefatory note as containing a number of 'reflections' that 'ne furent pas étrangères à la fondation de notre *Action française*' (not foreign to the foundation of our *Action française*).[34] Maurras's three ideas involve three figures, two of them heroes of thought, the other a renegade: first, albeit with serious reservations, Chateaubriand for the

[29] In the preface to the second edition Lasserre wrote: 'Je suis venu, dans l'analyse et la critique du romantisme, après de grands esprits, fort divers, qui s'appellent Stendhal, Nisard, Sainte-Beuve, Henri Heine, Louis Veuillot, Nietzsche, Charles Maurras' (In the analysis and criticism of romanticism, I follow in the footsteps of those great minds, all very different, called Stendhal, Nisard, Sainte-Beuve, Henri Heine, Louis Veuillot, Nieztsche, Charles Maurras) (*Le Romantisme français* (Paris, 1907; 2nd edn., 1908; repr. 1919), p. xi). For Lasserre the romantic conception of 'genius' reflected an irredeemable 'deformity' of the mind, a regression, in sophisticated guise, to 'barbarism' ('C'est la barbarie, mais la barbarie raffinée' (It is barbarism, but a refined barbarism) (p. 319)). Against this perversion of the soul, Lasserre pitted the programme of Action française: 'la Civilisation, l'État, la Patrie, la Loi, la Religion, la Tradition, la Famille' (Civilization, State, Fatherland, Law, Religion, Tradition, Family) (p. 198). Meanwhile in *Le Mal romantique* Ernest Seillière engaged at some length with Sainte-Beuve as a thinker who, while perhaps in his earlier phase too indulgent to the romantics and in his later phase too pessimistic over the potential of French culture to recover from the romantic malady, remained nevertheless an 'authority' (*Le Mal romantique: Essai sur l'impérialisme irrationnel* (Paris, 1908), 396–401).

[30] Charles Maurras, *Romantisme et révolution* (Paris, 1922), 186–7.

[31] David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton, 1995), 108.

[32] *NL* i. 401.

[33] Quoted in Compagnon, *La Troisième république des lettres*, 115.

[34] Charles Maurras, *Trois idées politiques*, in *Romantisme et révolution*, 242. The occasion was the triple commemorative event of the centenary of the birth of Michelet, the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Chateaubriand and the placing of a bust of Sainte-Beuve in the Jardin du Luxembourg. Action française was founded some months later.

Catholic–Legitimist cause;[35] secondly, Michelet as a false friend of France because of his 'impatience de l'ordre' (impatience of order) and 'furie de l'égalité' (furious egalitarianism);[36] thirdly, Sainte-Beuve for the value of something called 'l'empirisme organisateur' (organizing empiricism). The notion rests on a distinction between two kinds of 'analysis'. There is the decomposing kind of secular–scientific rationality, mechanistic, anti-vital (in this Maurras reveals himself as the 'romantic' he allegedly detested), and there is the recomposing or 'organizing' kind, respectful of wholeness, of the organic forms of both nature and society:

L'analyse passe aujourd'hui pour impuissante à donner autre chose que cette poussière de renseignements désséchés. Je ne sais pas d'erreur plus grande. S'il est très vrai que l'analyse décompose pour découvrir l'ordre de la composition, il n'est point vrai que cette décomposition, cette anatomie soient stériles pour la vie active et ne fassent que nous montrer l'ordre de ce qui est ou le mécanisme des composants. L'analyse fournit les éléments d'une composition: les personnes qui n'ont jamais usé de ce procédé sont les seules à l'ignorer.

En effet, l'analyse ne démembre point indistinctement tous les produits de la nature. Chez Sainte-Beuve, comme ailleurs, l'analyse choisit plutôt, entre les ouvrages dont on peut observer l'arrangement et le travail, les plus heureux et les mieux faits, ceux qui témoignent d'une perfection de leur genre et, pour ainsi dire appartiennent à la Nature triomphante, à la Nature qui achève et réussit.

Analysis is seen these days as powerless to provide anything other than this dust of dried-out data. I know of no greater error. If it is very true that analysis decomposes in order to discover the structure of a composition, it is no less true that this decomposition, this anatomy, are sterile contributions to active life and succeed only in showing us the structure of what is or the mechanism of its components. Analysis furnishes the elements of a composition; only those who have not used this procedure are ignorant of this fact.

Indeed, analysis does not dismember indiscriminately all the products of nature. In Sainte-Beuve, as elsewhere, analysis chooses rather, from among the works whose plan and process can be observed, the most felicitous and successfully wrought, those that attest to perfection in their genre and that, so to speak, belong to Nature triumphant, to a Nature that completes and succeeds.[37]

Stripped of its pseudo-epistemological overlay, what this account of constructive empiricism amounts to is a version of 'common sense' from the point of view of the Right. Sainte-Beuve embodies an empirical wisdom ('Chef d'œuvre initial de sagesse empirique' (An early masterpiece of empirical wisdom)) that 'échappe ainsi au risque de devenir anarchie et barbarie'

[35] For Maurras the 'revolutionary' in Chateaubriand betrayed the cause he ostensibly defended.

[36] Maurras, *Trois idées politiques*, 254.

[37] Ibid. 258.

(thus avoids the risk of becoming anarchy and barbarism).[38] Here Maurras finds a recipe for the salvation of 'la France moderne', but one that is also rooted in 'la vieille France … l'aspect ordonné et conservateur (au beau et ferme sens du mot) de tout le système' (the old France … the ordered and (in the best sense of the term) conservative aspect of the whole system).[39] This is a 'system' that maintains a 'tradition' grounded in blood and soil; as he put it in *Mes idées politiques*: 'Tradition veut dire transmission. La tradition rassemble les forces du sol et du sang' (Tradition means transmission. Tradition musters the forces of soil and blood).[40] It is accordingly a system that rejects everything that is alien to Frenchness, and in particular 'ces grands abus' (those great abuses) born of 'la lecture des livres juifs' (the reading of Jewish books).[41] Sainte-Beuve is the standard-bearer of this tradition ('La compagnie de Sainte-Beuve réunit … tout notre fonds solide et sain' (The company of Sainte-Beuve gathers together … the whole of our solid and healthy estate) (Beuvian words straight from the text of 'De la tradition')), and a literature inspired by his example—the sequence of adjectives is noteworthy: 'redevient intelligente, raisonnable, humaine, française' (becomes once more intelligent, reasonable, human, French).[42] From this encomium comes a remarkable proposal: the institution of a Sainte-Beuve Day:

> Il ne serait point surprenant que la France choisît un jour cette maison étroite, ce nom modeste et ce génie supérieur pour célébrer la fête de ses qualités distinctives. Tout compté, une fête nationale de Sainte-Beuve ne me semble pas une pure imagination … l'œuvre, le nom, la moyenne des idées de ce grand esprit … feraient le plus beau lieu du monde où se grouper dans une journée de réconciliation nationale.
>
> It would come as no surprise if one day France chose this narrow dwelling, this modest name and this superior genius to celebrate and commemorate his distinctive qualities. Taken all in all, a national Sainte-Beuve Day does not strike me as a pure figment of the imagination … the work, the name, the mean point of the ideas of this great mind … would constitute the most beautiful place in the world in which to gather for a day of national reconciliation.[43]

[38] Maurras, *Trois idées politiques*, 260.

[39] Ibid. 261. Paul Bourget linked 'analysis', as a curiosity-generating and thus uprooting mechanism, to the vices of 'cosmopolitanism' (*Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris, 1993), 201). He also ran a fictional experiment on the dire effects of the cosmopolitan disposition in his novel *Cosmopolis* (Paris, 1893). Being fictional, the results of the experiment were naturally guaranteed in advance. I am grateful to Richard Hibbitt for drawing my attention to these sources.

[40] Charles Maurras, *Mes idées politiques* (Paris, 1937), 67. The definition continues : 'On la conserve même en quittant son pays, comme une éternelle tentation d'y faire retour' (It is preserved even when leaving one's country, like an eternal temptation to return to it). This could be Sainte-Beuve on tradition and home-coming in 'De la tradition'.

[41] *Trois idées politiques*, 262. [42] Ibid. 263. [43] Ibid. 263.

'Une fête nationale de Sainte-Beuve': a day to banish forever the heresies of Bastille Day, a day devoted to 'reconciliation' (minus the Jews and other non-French 'elements'). Here we find Sainte-Beuve the 'doctor' (*médecin* is Maurras's term) in a new guise, his 'healthy' mind ('L'esprit le plus droit, le plus sain, le plus organique' (the most upright, the healthiest, the most organic mind)) and his 'method' put to use in an exercise of public 'hygiene' dedicated to cleansing the fatherland of the infections of foreignness: 'Une Hygiène, une Morale, une Politique, une Esthétique même et même une Religion peuvent naître, en effet, par la suite des lents progrès de ce qu'il nommait finement son "Histoire naturelle des esprits" ' (A Hygiene, a Morality, a Politics, even an Aesthetics and even a Religion could indeed come of this as the consequence of the slow progress of what he so astutely called his 'Natural History of minds').[44] For it to perform this task, however, it must also enact another function of 'empirisme organisateur': to reconcile, to make its community of both included and excluded, by containing the corrosively 'decomposing' effects of the bad sort of 'analysis', the unbridled intellectual 'curiosity' that invites the rational inspection of foundations ('le mécanisme des composants' or what, in connection with literature, Sainte-Beuve had called 'le *comment* de la composition'). The good—Beuvian—sort helps to conceal as well as reveal, to sustain the fiction, the lie on which the social order is based: 'Enfin l'appétit de savoir se peut même aussi refréner et tenir en respect par la considération de l'ordre public … On ne scie pas la branche sur laquelle on se trouve assis' (In short, the desire for knowledge could itself be restrained and rendered respectful out of consideration for public order … One does not saw the branch on which one finds oneself sitting).[45]

How much of this paean to concealment Maurras actually found in Sainte-Beuve's writings we cannot know (he quotes little) and, more to the point, how Sainte-Beuve might himself have felt about his name landing on the

[44] Ibid. 259–60. Even the committed Dreyfussard, Anatole France, harnessed Sainte-Beuve to the cause of the fatherland. In his negative review of the wandering, cosmopolitan life (France's key term is the eminently Barresian 'déracinée') of the Russian painter Marie Bashkirtseff (who died aged 24 from consumption), what contrastively springs to mind is the 'sedentary', stay-at-home Sainte-Beuve: 'En pensant aux agitations de cette âme trouble, en suivant cette vie déracinée et jetée à tous les vents de l'Europe, je murmure, avec la ferveur d'une prière, ce vers de Sainte-Beuve: *Naître, vivre et mourir dans la même maison*' (In thinking of that troubled soul, in following that deracinated life, thrown to all the winds of Europe, I murmur, with the fervour of prayer, that line of Sainte-Beuve's: *To be born, to live and to die in the same house*) (*Le Temps*, 12 June 1887, quoted in Barrès, *Romans et voyages*, i. 1251).

[45] *Trois idées politiques*, 260–1. Lepenies takes an altogether more relaxed view of Maurras's 'éloge étonnant' ('L'enthousiasme de Maurras pour Sainte-Beuve n'a de comparable que celui de Sainte-Beuve pour Diderot' (Maurras's enthusiasm for Sainte-Beuve can be compared only with that of Sainte-Beuve for Diderot) (*Sainte-Beuve au seuil de la modernité* (Paris, 2002), 115–17).

wilder shores of right-wing nationalism can be only a matter of speculation.[46] He would doubtless have been horror-struck by many of Maurras's views. On the other hand, the textual echoes are manifold, and may be said to converge on a further term that is to be found regularly in Maurras's work, as in that of Barrès: 'le bon Français'.[47] We recall how Sainte-Beuve's criticism of Stendhal reduces to the puerile claim that Stendhal is not a good novelist because he is not a good Frenchman. Conversely, Mathurin Marais qualifies as an admirable 'classic' of the middling range partly by virtue of being 'un esprit français … de bon aloi et bonne trempe' (a French mind … of good quality and fine calibre),[48] a model of sane 'Frenchness' elsewhere patriotically transferred, without a trace of ironic hesitation, to the 'renewal' promised by

[46] Louis Dimier, art historian and member of Action française, stressed Maurras's 'debt' to Sainte-Beuve in overtly political terms: 'Ainsi Charles Maurras a pris le nom de Sainte-Beuve comme enseigne politique de la chaire qu'il occupa un an à l'Institut d'Action française, et dans laquelle la matière politique fut soumise à cette même lumière de l'analyse intelligente' (Thus Charles Maurras took the name of Sainte-Beuve as the political emblem of the chair he occupied for one year at the Institute of Action française, and where political questions were subjected to that same light of intelligent analysis). For Dimier, this was not at all a misappropriation. Sainte-Beuve 'belongs' to us, 'sa pensée appartient à nous, à la réaction nécessaire' (his thought belongs to us, to the necessary reaction) (*Les Maîtres de la contre-révolution au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1917), 139, 155). Against this annexation to the cause of nationalism, we should, however, set what Sainte-Beuve said in his book on Chateaubriand: 'Le vrai génie se rit de ces distinctions et se pose où il lui plaît.—Et la philosophie elle-même, est-ce qu'elle ne se rit pas du patriotisme et de ces distinctions de peuple à peuple, de ces différentes formes de la politique? La philosophie n'est ni française ni anglaise. La vérité est la vérité' (True genius mocks these distinctions and installs itself where it pleases. And does not philosophy itself laugh at patriotism and those distinctions of people from people, those different forms of politics? Philosophy is neither French nor English. Truth is truth) (*Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire pendant l'Empire* (2 vols.; Paris, 1861), i. 60–1).

[47] In his writings on the Dreyfus Affair, Barrès quotes Jules Lemaître: 'Quelle doit être l'attitude d'un bon Français dans la question Dreyfus?' (What must be the attitude of a good Frenchman in the Dreyfus question?). His own answer was the demented argument that, even if innocent, Dreyfus should, for the sake of national unity and the reputation of the Army in particular, be found guilty. Barrès also wrote of Emile Zola that, while 'il se prétend bon Français' (he claims to be a good Frenchman), in fact 'cet homme n'est pas un Français' (this man is not French) (*Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (2 vols.; Paris, 1925), i. 43, 72). On the other hand, Barrès would not have taken kindly to Sainte-Beuve's view of Stendhal as un-French (Stendhal being one of Barrès's heroes in mounting the fiction of 'énergie nationale'). On Sainte-Beuve himself, Barrès is characteristically quirky, the 'individualist' in him preferring the young aspirant writer to the mature critic. In the 'Méditation sur Sainte-Beuve' in *Un homme libre*, he writes: 'Ecartant les œuvres du critique, je m'en tins au Sainte-Beuve de la vingtième année, aux misères de celui qui s'étonnait devant lui-même et qui, par la vertu de son orgueil studieux, trouvait des émotions profondes dans un infime détail de sa sensibilité' (Leaving aside the works of the critic, I hold to the Sainte-Beuve of his twentieth year, to the miseries of the individual astonished by himself and who, by virtue of his studious pride, discovered profound emotions in the tiniest detail of his sensibility) (*Romans et voyages*, i. 126–7). This is very far from the robustly commonsensical Sainte-Beuve foregrounded by Maurras.

[48] *NL* ix. 4.

the Second Empire: 'Quelque chose est dans l'air qui adoucit, qui rallie, et oblige tout *bon Français* à sentir que la France n'a jamais été dans une plus large voie de prospérité et de grandeur' (Something in the air that softens, rallies, and obliges every *good Frenchman* to feel that France has never been down such a broad avenue of prosperity and greatness).[49] And what of the true *pièce de résistance* in this vein, from the two consecutive articles on Louis Veuillot in 1861?

> Son plus beau moment de journaliste, et que rien ne saurait faire oublier, est celui de 1852 à 1855, pendant laquelle … il s'associa pleinement au sentiment public, à l'âme patriotique de la France, et fit acte d'adhésion éclatante à la politique impériale dans la guerre de Crimée, et pour les premières victoires … Ses portraits des *Deux Empereurs* (3 et 5 mars 1854), son article nécrologique sur le maréchal Saint-Arnaud (9 octobre), ses considérations sur la guerre, dans lesquels il nationalise, en quelque sorte, les idées de M. de Maistre … sont des chefs-d'œuvre. Qui pourrait les lire sans les admirer? Il y apparaît éloquent, enthousiaste, religieux à la fois et *bon Français*; et, pour parler son langage, 'tout rayonnant des meilleures ardeurs de la vie'. Je ne sais pas, en vérité, de plus noble prose ni dont la prose doive être plus fière. Ce sont là des pages d'histoire.
>
> His finest moment as a journalist, one that we shall never forget, is that of 1852 to 1855, when … he associated himself fully with public sentiment, with the patriotic soul of France, and aligned himself spectacularly with imperial policy in the Crimean war, and as a supporter of its first victories … His portraits of the *Two Emperors* (3 and 5 March 1854), his obituary of Marshal Saint-Arnaud (9 October), his reflections on the war, in which he, after a fashion, nationalizes the ideas of M. de Maistre … are masterpieces. Who can read them without admiring them? In them he shows himself as eloquent, enthusiastic, simultaneously religious and a *good Frenchman*; and, to speak his own language, 'radiant with passionate life'. In truth, I know of no nobler prose nor of any of which prose could be prouder.[50]

This instance of noble prose came from the pen of the ultramontane Catholic who in 1870 compared his French 'roots' to those of 'ancient oak trees' but who now found himself ruled by 'vagabonds', the latter consisting preeminently of the Jews.[51] It could not possibly have been this sort of thing that Sainte-Beuve had in mind at the time of lavishing praise on Veuillot's alleged literary talents. *Le Constitutionnel*, the newspaper in which he first published the *Lundis*, consistently attacked Veuillot, while Louis-Napoleon's government, mainly because of its difficult relations with the Vatican arising from its Italian policy, made a point of publicly dissociating itself from his views (their publication elicited a protest from within the Ministère de l'Instruction

[49] *Pr.L.* iii. 65 (emphasis added). [50] *NL* i. 75–6 (emphasis added).

[51] Quoted in Nathalie Isser, *Antisemitism during the French Second Empire* (American University Studies, Series IX, History, vol. 100; New York, 1991), 117.

publique et des Cultes[52]). Veuillot's virulent anti-Semitism appeared in print long before 1870, most notably in a series of articles published in 1858. Sainte-Beuve could not have been ignorant of these diatribes, but in his own article he carefully confines himself to a period of Veuillot's journalistic career prior to 1858 (1852–5), while also emphasizing that his purpose is less to evaluate Veuillot's gifts as a thinker than to do 'justice' to his qualities as a writer, at their best displaying what 'un partisan des classiques ne ferait pas mieux' (a partisan of the classics would not do better).[53]

With someone like Veuillot, Sainte-Beuve was doing what he recommended for the impartial critic in the article on Pierre Bayle: in entering an alien world, run the risk of 'misalliance'.[54] But was it misalliance or genuine affinity when, in his homage to Veuillot's patriotic exhortations, Sainte-Beuve unnervingly settled on the description 'bon Français'? What this amounted to was an assimilation of Veuillot to the tradition of 'le vrai et naïf génie national' (the true and naive national genius)—namely, 'le courant gaulois' that Veuillot himself had denounced as 'détestable' in favour of the more austere genre of the sacred and the episcopal. Sainte-Beuve's ruse was to turn the tables on Veuillot by reclaiming him as, in the marrow of his bones, a member of the organic national community: 'Mais il a beau faire, il en tient, lui, à son corp défendant et *jusqu'aux moëlles*; il est bien du fonds gaulois et du plus dru … c'est du mâle gaulois, c'est du bon Régnier en prose, c'est un rude et vaillant compère' (But, notwithstanding his own intentions, he himself stems from this, against his own will and *in the marrow of his bones*; he is exactly of Gaulish stock, of the most thickset kind … he is all virile Gaulishness, a solid Régnier in prose, a robust and worthy associate).[55] This is what it meant to be a good Frenchman. It is also what to a very large extent Maurras meant by it.[56]

[52] Compagnon, *Connaissez-vous Brunetière?*, 153. As we have seen, Sainte-Beuve favoured the Gallican position over the Ultramontane.

[53] *NL* i. 73.

[54] 'Le génie critique … ne craint pas de se mésallier' (The critical genius … does not fear misalliance) (*PL* 255).

[55] *NL* i. 57–8 (emphasis in original). Maurras uses the same image in connection with Sainte-Beuve: 'sans se vanter, mais infatigablement (bien plus qu'un Nisard, à vrai dire), il s'imprègne de la vraie moëlle nationale: vivacité du XVIII siècle, doctrine du XVIIe' (without being boastful, but indefatigably (much more so than Nisard, to tell the truth), he soaked himself in the true backbone of the nation: liveliness of the eighteenth century, the doctrine of the seventeenth) (*Trois idées politiques*, 257). In the marrow of the bone, and thus in the blood. Michel Crépu, on the other hand, offers a far more modest, even anaemic, version of what it meant to Sainte-Beuve to be 'French': 'En avoir fini, une fois pour toutes, avec l'*enthousiasme*. C'est peut-être cela, pour Sainte-Beuve, être français' (To have finished once and for all with *enthusiasm*. That perhaps is what, for Sainte-Beuve, it means to be French) (*Sainte-Beuve: Portrait d'un sceptique* (Paris, 2001), 253–4).

[56] Pedro Descoqs, the Catholic priest who acted as spiritual adviser to Action française, counselled that the latter should follow 'ces maîtres excellents' (Bonald, de Maistre, and

Amongst other things, being a good Frenchman also meant remaining true to the legacy of Antiquity, of which France was the privileged legatee. This is more or less what Sainte-Beuve had affirmed in *Étude sur Virgile* and elsewhere. In 1899 Ferdinand Brunetière (no friend of Gustave Lanson and also a member of the Ligue de la Patrie) published a piece on the theme of 'le génie latin'. To his credit Brunètiere argued (perhaps inspired by Renan's 'Qu'est-ce-qu'une nation?' of 1882) that 'ce n'est ni le sang, ni la langue, ni la conquête qui font les peuples: les nations se font d'elles-mêmes' (it is neither blood nor language nor conquest that makes a people: nations are self-creating).[57] But this view of autochthonous national self-generation was accompanied by a lecture also given in 1899 bearing the title 'Les ennemis de l'âme française'. In 1905 this fear of the enemy within was specified as the following 'question': 'La grande question est si la France veut "se défranciser" ' ( The great question is whether France wishes to 'de-Frenchify' itself).[58] Brunetière is sometimes positioned as the 'successor' of Sainte-Beuve.[59]

I have suggested that Sainte-Beuve is among the last to use the word *classique* with a moderate degree of self-confident innocence. But it is a form of lastness that, both within Sainte-Beuve's own terms and from the point of view of an aftermath of appropriation, hovers on the brink of entering a far more disturbing epoch. It is certainly far too late by the time of Eliot's resurrection of the question 'what is a classic?' in 1946, brandishing Virgil as the 'classic of all Europe' at the moment when Europe lay in ruins, the effects

Veuillot) (*Études 121* (Paris, 1909), 773 n., quoted in Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics 1890–1914* (Cambridge, 1982), 122).

[57] Brunetière, 'Discours de combat', quoted in Compagnon, *Connaissez-vous Brunetière?*, 181. Lasserre devoted a long chapter of *Le Romantisme français* to what its title termed 'la défense du latin' (pp. 124–44). Maurras, of course, claimed a similar legacy: 'le développement de notre nationalité au XVIe, au XVIIe siècle et même au XVIIIe siècle: si complet, si brillant, d'une humanité si parfaite que la France est devenue l'héritière légitime du monde grec et romain. Par elle la mesure, la raison et le goût ont régné sur notre Occident' (the development of our nationality in the sixteenth, in the seventeenth century and even in the eighteenth century: so complete, so brilliant, of such perfected humanity that France became the legitimate inheritor of the Greek and Roman world. Through it, measure, reason, and taste have reigned over our Western civilization) (*Mes idées politiques*, 83). In 1930 the journal *Latinité* published a two-page paean, in Latin, to Mussolini. In the same year it devoted a special issue to a 'Hommage à Virgile et Mistral', while also claiming that 1930 was to be 'l'année de la Latinité' (quoted in Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton, 1993), 16, 67).

[58] Quoted in Compagnon, *Connaissez-vous Brunetière?*, 220.

[59] Ibid. 7. Brunetière discussed Sainte-Beuve the critic in the fourth volume of his *Histoire de la littérature française classique*. He reproached Sainte-Beuve with being too 'biographical' and too focused on 'écrivains secondaires'. At the same time he praised him for linking criticism not just to the model of 'families' of minds but also to the notion that there was a 'hierarchy' of families. The task of the critic was to contribute to the building of that hierarchy (*Histoire de la littérature française classique*, iv. *XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1917), 290–1, 298).

of 'barbarism' visible to all. Eliot, we should recall, was deeply influenced by Maurras, notwithstanding the coy reference as early as 1928 to 'some of the extravagances' of Maurras's ideas.[60] Let us not forget that Maurras also spoke of the need to rehabilitate Sainte-Beuve in the defence of 'tous les pays de culture classique' (all the countries of classical culture)[61] or what elsewhere he called 'cette raison, ce droit, cette loi, cet ordre, ce goût qui rassemblaient tout le capital civilisateur de l'esprit classique' (that form of reason, law, order, taste that accumulated all the civilizing capital of the classical spirit) (Voltaire, in particular, handed an accolade as 'éclairé par le génie antisémitique de l'occident' (enlightened by the anti-Semitic genius of the West)).[62] Let us also not forget that shortly before Eliot drafted his lecture, another disciple of Maurras (he broke from him over their disagreement on the continuing publication of *Je suis partout* during the Occupation), Robert Brasillach, was executed for collaboration with the Nazis, the same Brasillach who in 1931 had published a book about Virgil, its title: *Présence de Virgile*.

Brasillach's book was described by his right-wing friend, Maurice Bardèche, as 'une sorte d'épopée d'Action française' (a kind of epic of Action française).[63] It is not hard to see why. The *Aeneid* 'est l'histoire d'un homme qui s'identifie, quoi qu'il lui en coûte, à sa nation' (the story of a man who, whatever the cost, identifies himself with his nation), an identification shared by Virgil in 'l'amour de sa nation' (his love of nation) and, more tellingly, in 'la passion de sa terre charnelle' (his carnal passion for the earth), all this in a chapter with the eminently Barresian title 'La Terre et les morts', which also includes a passing salute to Mistral.[64] Since Mistral's Provençal attachments were hitched to the bandwagon of Action française, it is at once both unsurprising, politically, and astoundingly implausible, intellectually, that, when Brasillach speaks of Virgil's 'passion de sa terre charnelle', the analogy he reaches for is with the peasants and olive trees of Mistral's Provence.[65] This approach to Virgil did not come out of the blue. Brasillach's teacher at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, the deeply conservative André Bellessort, had previously published a book on Virgil (in 1920), which pressed the Franco-Latinity agenda with all the fervour of his contemporary nationalist Germanophobes. Bellessort also wrote a study of Sainte-Beuve and the nineteenth century, in which, although he did not mention the *Étude sur Virgile*, he warmly commended Sainte-Beuve's

[60] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 284.
[61] Maurras, *Trois idées politiques*, 263. [62] Maurras, *Romantisme et révolution*, 4, 7.
[63] Quoted in Marc Chouet, 'Brasillach et Virgile', *Cahiers des amis de Robert Brasillach*, 17 (1972), 57.
[64] Virgil was indeed an important reference for Barrès, most notably in *Amori et dolori sacrum*.
[65] Robert Brasillach, *Présence de Virgile* (Paris, 1960), 188–201.

positive remarks on Veuillot.[66] There were also Seillière's earlier reflections on 'l'impérialisme dans Virgile', in *L'Impérialisme démocratique*, where, citing the late and increasingly reactionary Proudhon on the subject of Virgil in *De la justice*, Seillière reads in the *Aeneid* 'un beau programme d'impérialisme' (a fine imperialist programme) incarnating 'la mission providentielle et progressive des races supérieures' (the providential and progressive mission of the superior races) and 'le développement providentiel de la puissance latine' (the providential development of Latin power).[67] Throughout this book, I have maintained that Sainte-Beuve's thought was relatively untainted by metaphors of blood and soil, but this is perhaps the point to recall that, in *Étude sur Virgile*, the affiliation of France with Virgil and the Augustan imperium attracted the image of the bloodline (the descendants of Rome 'ont un reste de sang latin jusque dans leurs veines' (have a trace of Latin blood deep in their veins)).[68]

In drawing attention to this history, I do not mean to imply, in relation to Sainte-Beuve, the kind of teleology in which, for example, Schiller's aesthetic theory has been seen as leading to Goebbels and the death camps. If we were to apply Sainte-Beuve's own figure of the literary 'family', whereby writers from different times are imagined conversing together as intellectual and spiritual relatives, it is unclear what we might come up with in projecting an exchange between Sainte-Beuve and Brasillach on the subject of Virgil, or between Sainte-Beuve and Maurras on the subject of Latinity. In emphasizing the virtues of the latter, it was part of Sainte-Beuve's purpose to rescue a 'humanist' ideal from the threat posed by the developing ethno-nationalisms whose principal disciplinary fields in Germany had been comparative philology and classical

[66] André Bellessort, *Virgile: Son Œuvre et son temps* (Paris, 1920). On Sainte-Beuve and Veuillot, Bellessort wrote that 'Sainte-Beuve s'honora en consacrant deux articles à ce mâle et génial ouvrier de la prose française … il sent en Veuillot un tel fonds de bon sens, une santé littéraire si robuste … que la sympathie est encore plus forte que les restrictions' (It is to the honour of Sainte-Beuve that he devoted two articles to that virile and genial worker of French prose … he detects in Veuillot such a stock of common sense, such a robust literary health … that his sympathies are far stronger than his reservations) (*Sainte-Beuve et le dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1954), 307–8).

[67] Ernest Seillière, *L'Impérialisme démocratique* (Paris, 1907), 299–300. We might also note here Valéry's translation of the *Eclogues*, which came out in the fateful year 1944, along with an introduction in which Virgil's submission to imperial Augustan power was used to justify collaboration (*Œuvres* (Paris, 1957), i. 207–81). On the other hand, from the late nineteenth century onwards, there were also voices resisting this form of Virgil-worship: in ch. 3 of Huysmans's *A rebours*, Des Esseintes turns impatiently away from 'le doux Virgile' as 'l'un des plus terribles cuistres, l'un des plus sinistres raseurs que l'antiquité ait jamais produits' (one of the most awful prigs, one of the most sinister bores that antiquity ever produced) (*A rebours* (Paris, 1895), 37). Huysmans, along with Mallarmé and others, was, of course, one of the 'decadents' denounced by the intellectuals of the Right.

[68] *Étude sur Virgile* (Paris, 1857), 36.

studies; to this extent he could be said to have had more in common with the 'classical humanism' of Julien Benda and others associated with the *Nouvelle Revue française* than with the writers and intellectuals who allied themselves with Action française. On the other hand, in identifying the privileged face of the heritage of Latinity with the particularity of France, Sainte-Beuve's thought acquired a more nationalist hue, feeding, directly or indirectly, into those later forms of right-wing intellectual life whose Germanophobia was but a mirror image of what it detested.

At the outset I referred to René Wellek's characterization of Sainte-Beuve as 'a major figure in European intellectual history', adding that, if we were take this assertion at face value, the question remained as to *which* intellectual history Sainte-Beuve most properly belongs. Wellek himself makes much of the centrality of Virgil to Sainte-Beuve's conception of the 'tradition' and the 'classic' ('Virgil is the center of his cult').[69] But he is entirely silent on the historical aftermath of Virgil-worship in France.[70] At the very least, this is a history that might give us pause for thought where the continuing serviceability of the term 'classic' is concerned. The arguments of both Kermode and Coetzee are really arguments about both the literary objects to which the term 'classic' is normally applied and the ways in which they may be appropriately read (through the prism of 'the decentering acts of criticism'), rather than about the value of the term itself.[71] We may indeed need reminders of a great literary past to protect us from 'barbarism', but it is by no means obvious that we need the term 'classic' to do so, especially when we recall how it was used in the twentieth century to denounce 'barbarism' in the name of a far more lethal form of the barbaric. If there is a reason for relinquishing the term (including its retrospective application to Sainte-Beuve himself[72]), and leaving Sainte-Beuve's way with it in the last century but one, this surely is it.

[69] René Wellek, 'Sainte-Beuve', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven, 1965), 57.

[70] In his article 'Classicism in Literature' for the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Wellek notes, if not the appropriation of Virgil by the far Right, its attempted colonizing of the term 'classicism' (see above, Ch. 2 n. 37).

[71] Kermode summarizes it thus: 'It seems that on a just view of the matter the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under varying dispositions' (*The Classic*, 45). The formulation of the position is apt, but does not of itself explain why 'the books we call classics' should continue to be called such.

[72] Lepenies's closing words describe Sainte-Beuve as 'un grand critique … un classique' (a great critic … a classic) (*Sainte-Beuve*, 471).

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